

Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review

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Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review

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The Review is a peer-reviewed publication that is available online through the Australian Psychological Society website. Its remit is to encourage research that challenges the stereotypes and assumptions of pathology that have often inhaled to research on lesbians and gay men (amongst others). The aim of the Review is thus to facilitate discussion over the direction of lesbian and gay psychology in Australia, and to provide a forum within which academics, practitioners and lay people may publish.

The Review is open to a broad range of material, and especially welcomes research, commentary and reviews that critically evaluate the status quo in regards to lesbian and gay issues. The Review also seeks papers that redress the imbalance that has thus far focused on the issues facing white lesbians and gay men, to the exclusion of other sexual and racial groups.

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Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review

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EDITORIAL

DAMIEN W. RIGGS

It seems like a long time since we have had a general issue of *GLIP Review*: April 2006 to be precise. Since then we have had three wonderful special issues – the first on LGBT ageing edited by Jo Harrison and myself, the second on methodological, theoretical and ethical issues in lesbian and gay psychology, and the third on parenting, family issues and heteronormativity, edited by Liz Short and myself. These special issues highlight the broad areas of research currently being conducted in Australia and beyond in specific subfields of lesbian and gay psychology, and also draw attention to the interdisciplinary nature of the field.

Similarly, this issue of *GLIP Review* highlights the broad range of papers that are submitted to the journal on a regular basis, and which come from as diverse fields as religion studies, legal studies, drama studies and the social sciences. The importance of lesbian and gay psychology, and its gradual broadening out towards what has been termed LGBTQ psychologies (Clarke & Peel, 2007), is largely due to its ability to engage with such a range of disciplinary fields and theoretical approaches. Such a breadth of foci occurs largely as a result of the ongoing marginalisation of issues pertaining to LGBT people within the academy, and the continued denial of rights to LGBT people both within Australia and internationally. In other words, it is necessary to engage across disciplines in order to present multiple challenges to, and interrogations of, heteronormativity.

Important also to the field of lesbian and gay psychology is the politics of voice. As the papers and commentaries in this issue demonstrate, those writing within the field speak from a range of identity positions, and utilise these in various ways within their work. As work in the field of queer theory continues to demonstrate, the 'queering' of psychology occurs not simply by those LGBT people who challenge heteronormativity, but also by people who identify as heterosexual and actively resist or critique the normalising tendencies of academic research.

This issue of the journal includes five articles, two commentaries and three book reviews. In regards to articles, Janet A. McDonald opens the

issue with her insightful and exciting examination of representations of masculinity and the West within the film *Brokeback Mountain*. Importantly, McDonald explores the intersections of the characters, the actors, and the filmmakers in the production of a text that queers the Western genre at the very same time as it asserts its normative impulses.

Moving to a quite different, yet not unrelated, area of focus, Phillip Duffey provides an extensive elaboration of Australian adoption law as it pertains to same-sex attracted people, and explores the implications of this for international adoptions and judgments within family law as they relate to same-sex families. In a context of ongoing international debates and changes to legislation about same-sex adoption, Duffey's paper is timely and much needed.

Victor Marsh then takes up the politics of voice by exploring what it means to engage with Asian religions as a white queer man. His work, drawing as it does from his own experience, and teamed with an insightful analysis of a broad range of previous research and traditions, results in an important piece of writing that spans the academic, literary and autobiographical.

Murray J.N. Drummond and Shaun M. Filiault then shift our attention from voices to bodies (and their intersections) in their analysis of gay men's talk about penis size and masculinity. Drummond and Filiault's research reminds us that whilst social stereotypes about gay men may promote a uniform understanding of gay men's relationship to their own and other men's genitalia, these relationships are complex and must be situated within social contexts wherein particular forms of masculinity are valorised.

In the final paper in the article section, written from within the US context, Jennifer N. Gill utilises a narrative analysis to examine pro- and anti-same-sex marriage debates. Gill highlights the narrative stability of the pro argument in contrast with the anti argument that fails to thoroughly produce narrative coherence. Gill also reminds us of the complexity of these debates not only amongst heterosexual people, but also within LGBT communities.

In regards to the two commentaries, it is important to note, as has been the case throughout the course of the publication of the *Review*, commentaries, whilst often representing shorter pieces of work, are no less rigorous or theoretical in their outlook. Whilst some of the commentaries published have included personal reflections on current issues, most have included important theoretical and empirical insights that reflect the breadth of academic, peer-reviewed research in Australia. The two commentaries in this issue are important examples of this trend.

The first of the two commentaries, by John Ryan, explores what it means to identify as same-sex attracted in a regional setting. Ryan elaborates, from personal experience, the complexities of regional life, and challenges those of us living in urban centers to explore how issues of queer belonging are variously accessible according to geographical location.

In the second commentary Sharon Chalmers explores the meanings and contents associated with curating a queer art exhibition. Chalmers explores matters of community and belonging as they relate to the Australian context, and highlights the role that race, in conjunction with sexuality, plays in the space accorded to particular voices. Importantly, Chalmers questions the ways in which normativity functions *within* queer communities, and highlights the need for ongoing considerations of claims to inclusivity.

The issue also includes three book reviews on matters pertaining to the papers in the issue: one on gay men and body image, one on the

experiences of bisexual men, and one on the intersections of sexuality and religion.

The issue concludes with two calls for papers, one of which is for the August 2008 issue of *GLIP Review*. Readers are invited to consider submitting work for this as it will no doubt be an important and widely read issue.

On the whole, this general issue coheres around issues of voice, representation, normativity and belonging. The articles, commentaries and reviews both sit alongside and juxtapose one another, an important aspect of lesbian and gay psychology more broadly. As this issue highlights, voices within the field are diverse and at times contradictory, and it is this diversity that we celebrate and welcome through the work of *GLIP Review*.

Acknowledgments

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QUEERING THE REPRESENTATION OF THE MASCULINE 'WEST' IN ANG LEE'S *BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN*

JANET A. MCDONALD

Abstract

*The colonial construction of Western dominance over Eastern 'others' features predominantly in postcolonial theory (as do those of the North over the South). Assumptions about geographical placement and origin are also sources of gendered space, especially if one subscribes to the representation of female space as 'inner' or domestic and masculine spaces as 'outer' or embracing of the outdoors. Popular notions of the cowboy as an embodiment of 'outdoor' masculinity endorses and repeats the colonial West as a dominant and desirable masculine representation, which has popularly evolved over time as a stable gender category through the use of cowboy imagery to sell 'manly' habits such as smoking (Marlborough Man), and to selling the hypermasculinised American Masculine Dream (John Wayne). The characters from Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (BBM) are from the great American cowboy traditions; the frontiering West of Wyoming and Texas. The film uses the celebrity bodies of Jake Gyllenhaal and Heath Ledger to queer the cowboy whilst simultaneously maintaining the dominant homosocial attributes of the colonial West. The actors' actual bodies are neither queer nor cowboy, and their celebrity status suggests a gender performative 'fraud', yet the 'star power' of the actors alone has catapulted BBM from independent film obscurity into mainstream discussion and popular culture.*

Introduction

This paper comes out of further deliberations about my research on the performance of actual and fictional masculinities upon the body (McDonald, 2006; 2007a; 2007b), which has encouraged me to think further on the coercive and colonial nature of constructed fictions where embodied characters speak on behalf of the audience. Actors are both products of culture and cultural products (Buchbinder, 1998, p. 2), and actor-celebrity bodies are surfaces for maintaining dominant notions of gender separateness. Film making institutions 'normalise' the actor-celebrity as a stable category of popular culture, and the process of

grooming and ornamentation that is involved with plucking would-be celebrities from obscurity and re-packaging them is a slick, embodied marketing tool that is a repeatable act of inscription upon the body of the actor. A recent article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* entitled "The New Lads Muscle In" (Abramowitz, 2007) trumpets that the "age of the pretty boy is over" and that Hollywood wants its young leads to have more masculine appeal: the process of celebrity-body-making-for-popular-consumption is laid bare in this article.

The construction of the male actor-celebrity body will be explored in this paper because more often than not the hypermasculinised set of symbols and images that are rendered visible can be directly linked to a dollar value in the business; if the right combination of production team and ornamental bodies are placed in a film set, the returns on the investment can be very lucrative for all involved. The Focus Features film *Brokeback Mountain* (BBM) is no exception: the combination of director Ang Lee's reputation for capturing intimate moments in epic-styled narratives, cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto's vision, and the celebrity bodies of Jake Gyllenhaal and Heath Ledger, gave BBM the most (eight) nominations at the 2006 Academy Awards (winning Best Director, Best Original Score, and Best Adapted Screenplay). BBM only cost \$14 million to produce and began with a limited release in the USA in early December 2005. By Christmas it was declared a box-office success as the highest per theatre gross of any movie that year. The film grossed \$83 million in the USA alone and \$178 million worldwide. It is ranked 5th in the highest grossing Westerns (since 1980) behind *Dances with Wolves*, *Unforgiven*, *Maverick* and *Back to the Future III*.¹

I read this film as an exploration of masculinities, which postcolonially queers the notion of the most revered of all American masculine symbols; the cowboy. Simply referring to BBM as a 'gay cowboy' film is fraught with problems of reactionary contradictions that

¹ Rankings retrieved from Box Office Mojo website: <http://boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=western.htm>.

maintain and limit the term 'gay' as a colonial Other to straight. This paper will explore the interface between postcolonial and queering processes upon the fictional American West cowboy as represented by the celebrity bodies of Gyllenhaal and Ledger, whose celebrity status propelled the film's surprising mainstream success.

Putting the West in Western

In postcolonial writings, geographical symbols are used to represent and polarise difference. Notions of Western civilisation as a white, privileged and dominant space are well established over the East, (just as 'the North' is over the 'the South'). Such notions employ discourses to mark off the Other and also polarise the perceived separateness of genders in the traditional histories and fictions of the American Western. The geographical grounding of the American West began in 19th century frontiers of the United States after the Louisiana Purchase from France in 1803 when a large proportion of men left the East of the USA seeking new opportunities for employment and investment (West of the Rockies was still 'uncharted' and under Mexican control until 1846-48). Although women (mostly wives) and male immigrants (Irish, Chinese, etc.) also embraced this journey, it is through the colonial discourse of the white man that this expansion takes on epic and romantic proportions. Thus began the physicalisation of the notion of Manifest Destiny, which as journalist John L. Sullivan wrote in 1839, was a God-given right of the US to spread the 'great experiment of Liberty' throughout America. This ideology very much anchored the explosion of the Western genre of literature, which recounted many masculine stories of hardship and journeys, with an "unapologetic exclusion of femininity" (Tompkins, cited in Packard, 2006, p. 8). The status of cowboys relies upon bachelorhood formed around a homosocial partnership, and Tompkins argues that this literature served as "reactionary narratives" to the "then-popular sentimental-domestic novels that were flooding the marketplace and promoting ideas of female influence at the sphere of the home" (p. 8). The popularity of Western fictions affected the culture of language in the USA; the phrase 'going West' originally meant 'going bad' or 'off the rails' (presumably going West to get away from trouble), yet it quickly became 'Go West, young man, go West', used by New York Tribune journalist and aspiring politician Horace

Greeley in reference to the vast opportunities available to develop manhood along frontier USA (Quinion, 2003).

In theatre and movie scholarship it is widely agreed that the two most popular and organic creative products of the USA came from this era: the stage musical and the Western. The latter emerging from the hyper-realistic frontiers melodramas (such as Davy Crocket, and Buffalo Bill's Wild West extravaganzas that toured throughout the 1880s-90s), which were hugely popular throughout the 19th century both in the USA and Europe. The Western film genre did much to perpetuate the myth of the cowboy as a true and stable embodiment of American manliness; the Western remains one of the most popular film genres of all time. The Classic Westerns reached their zenith in the films of the all-American director John Ford. Throughout the 60s-70s such films made John Wayne a household name. The Western continues to create a hyper-frontier-masculinity that is a highly consumable and desirable product, made manifest corporeally on the bodies of male actors (sometimes female, but not often) who are agents of dissemination. The Western had and has the power to make stars out of actors; it may even be considered a right of passage for some American actors whose celebrity status has certainly upturned after a stint in a popular Western. The appeal to the larger audience is bankable; Westerns are a good investment even if, generally, films are not.

The American West represented in these films is a hypermasculinised and colonial space where notions of being outdoors, living rough, 'conquest' and appropriation are masculine and dominant. The Western literature that preceded the film genre was also a mass process of naturalising white men into the frontiers, so that the West represents a desirability of dominance, particularly over the South (Mexico, not southeast of the Mississippi). By the late 1850s the term 'going South' replaced 'going West' as a euphemism for situations turning sour/turning for the worse, but also for sexual activity that might be perverse. In American States that border with Mexico, 'going south' continues to mark off the South as somewhere where rack and ruin awaits; where contraband can be obtained and exploitation of all sorts can be purchased. These Southwestern states position Mexico with some hostility, as foreign (more so than Canada) and abject. The character Jack Twist in *BBM* makes a habit of slipping off unseen at night across the border from Texas

into Mexico to have silent and anonymous sex with a dark Latino male body in an alleyway. The 'south' is therefore menacing, as it is maintained as a place of dark pleasures in this film, consistent with white colonial perspective of the South.

Queering Cowboy, Queering Celebrity

Certainly the romantic, melodramatic narrative used in BBM maintains and perpetuates several binary differences. From a performance perspective, the Western film is predominantly in the style of a melodrama (again harking back to its theatrical debut in the Wild West shows). The melodramatic form is a highly coercive narrative structure that mixes the tensions between romantic love and the interface between clearly delineated good and bad behaviours. The popularity of this genre is imbedded in the belief by the audience that wrongs or 'unnaturalness' will be resolved and righted by the end of the story or film. As it turns out, the abject, outed 'gay' bodies are put to death in BBM (the old man of Del Mar's memory and Twist both experience tortuous deaths reminiscent of Matthew Shephard's brutal murder in *Casper, Wyoming* in 1998). Rural queers it seems don't live for long, which increases the audience's empathy with Ennis Del Mar, who maintains the façade that cowboy masculinity is definable and stable, which automatically sets up a binary notion of gender in the film (Petersen, 2003, p.58). The feminine domestic sphere is in direct conflict with the mountain scenes where Del Mar and Twist are able to consummate their homosexual attraction. The outdoors in BBM is a masculine-only realm that naturalises and nourishes male-male relationships, which then remain unspoken and inexplicable to the women and children occupying the domestic space. Like most Western films before it, this duality of gendered space is key to all the tensions in the story: once the men enter into the domestic sphere, their lack of independence begins to deform their once Arcadian-like masculine existence in the wilderness. Chris Packard in his book *Queer Cowboys* (2005) tells us that the "normalising function of marriage to women and the domesticating influence of femininity [was] a "deal-breaker" for those following the cowboy code (p. 8), and BBM faithfully reconstructs this.

In the research field known as New Western History (which is now only a decade old), the interrogation of colonial cowboy masculinity is

dedicated to retelling and recovering history from the view of silent (yet nonetheless coded) 'voices' from the American West. This field also investigates the inherent and falsely assumed 'stability' of the hypermasculinised cowboy. According to Packard, the cowboy is queer when analysed inside a heteronormative cultural context; "he resists community, he eschews lasting ties with women but embraces rock-solid bonds with same-sex partners, and practices same-sex desire" (2006, p.3). Certainly the literature from the West that Packard investigates reveals a rich example of complex male relationships that suggest intimacy that is homosocial and homosexual. The 'norms' of what constitute 'partnerships' are changed on the frontier so that overt homosociality queers the notion of a life-long partner from one that is colonially separate (women's domestic space) to one that places male-male affection as a necessity for survival. In other words, this 'queering' moves away from simply addressing the complexity of cowboy homosociality as something *in opposition to* female-ness, and towards considering it as something where there are complex amorphous notions of masculinity at work which parallel heteronormative desires. The writings of New Western Historians are not dissimilar to those of contemporary queer theorists, in that the colonial binary opposition that underpins discussion of difference between male/female, straight/gay gender becomes compromised and outmoded by investigations into the complexity of the assumptions about duality and separateness.

Several contemporary queer theorists state their awareness and avoidance of adhering to these 'dualist distinctions' when discussing difference, although these oppositions were first presented in early feminist and queer theory (Linstead & Pullen, 2006, p. 1287; Petersen, 2003, p. 57; Walters, 2005, p. 8). Petersen and Walters both argue that maintaining a discourse of differences empowers a normative understanding of gender (Petersen, 2003, p. 59) that fails to move beyond a discourse of contradictions or reactions (Walters, 2005, p. 9). Gender is a complex social and cultural practice where binaries are disrupted and displaced by practices and performances that articulate liminal spaces beyond oppositional structures. Inside the colonial setting of BBM, the naturalised homosociality (instantly recognisable in the first 40 minutes of the film) becomes deliberately and inalterably 'queered' through the act of penetration that Ledger and Gyllenhaal embody on the screen, taking place in a tent, on the

mountain, in the wilderness. For many audience members, this was the line that crossed into homosexuality and the characters quickly became 'gay' and the movie known as the 'gay cowboy movie'. Yet, to dismiss the film in this way denies the film any agency for the complex queering going on. The term gay is just as much a construction as the terms 'male' and 'female' in BBM, and thus queer theory as it is employed in this paper is about moving away from the dualism of difference and opening the aperture on 'queering' as a process of questioning the dominant and colonial insistence on structured 'stable' categories of gender, etc. Queer theory offers a critical discourse with which to menace and "challenge gender hegemony...[to] make both theoretical and political space for more substantiative notions of multiplicity and intersectionality" (Walters, 2005, p. 11). As such, there is a genuine connection between queer and postcolonial theory that pursues gender as a process of construction written upon the body.

Just as the cowboy is queered in the New Western History, I would suggest that the actor-celebrity body is also a queered surface in the postmodern world. Aspects of Judith Butler's notion of the performativity of gender are somewhat compromised upon entering a discussion about celebrity; the celebrity body is contrived and therefore self-aware of the performance of itself. Yet, the desirability of this body is a significant aspect of representation that produces what Buchbinder calls the process of ex-citation, that is, an external citation of gender that is rendered visible, repeatable, coherent and natural (1998, p. 122). Before embarking on the BBM project, the bodies of Ledger and Gyllenhaal were already hypermasculinised in the popular press as objects and agents of heterosexual and homosexual desire, which is nothing new for Hollywood actors who are a consumerable commodity. To varying degrees, actor-celebrities are co-constructors of symbolic orders which are "simultaneously productive and produced" (Brickell, 2005, p. 37), and which can be read as "phoney" as they represent an illusion, or a deceit of the "actual" body (Buchbinder, 1998, p. 123). The business of celebrity-making is therefore 'queer' as the actor's actual body becomes a public agent for fiction. It is the vehicle upon which the fiction is delivered and read by the audience, and this fictional contagion crosses over onto the actor's actual body creating a veneer of 'celebrity' that is "something akin to the actual, but not quite"

(Bhabha, 1994, p. 86). The celebrity surface has slippage and is highly unstable as a category of signifying of anything precisely because it is an abject triangulation of the actual, the fictional and the celebrity body. The celebrity aspect queers any simple dualistic distinction between the 'fictional' and 'actual' body of the actor, because their bodies are never entirely fictional *nor* actual.

Queering as Ambivalence: Intersectionality and Interdiction

The celebrity-cowboy body is not only queer; it is an inscribed body that does not speak of or for itself, but of the writers of the narrative. Larry McMurty and Dianna Ossana (who produced the film also) wrote the screenplay from Annie Proulx's (2000) short story, and thus it may be suggested that the pre-textual constructions that preceded the visual representation of characters in BBM was also a process of mimicry of the American West's cowboy. The deliberate location of the picture as a melodramatic and romantic Western that maintains the heterosexual dualism is an act of what Homi Bhabha might call "colonial mimicry," which sets up a recognisable Other "as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (1994, p. 86). The potential power of the representation of the queered cowboy (produced through this ambivalence associated with mimicry, which is almost but not quite the classic cowboy) points to the constructedness of the colonial image; it "does not merely 'rupture' the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a partial presence" that is "incomplete and virtual" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86). The visibility of this mimicry, of course, is inscribed upon the celebrity bodies of Gyllenhaal and Ledger who are neither cowboys nor homosexual in their actual lives, and yet their mimicking of the Western cowboy tradition must have genuine resemblance in order to for the ambivalence to "menace" the absolute notions of the Western cowboy (p. 88).

The production team that constructed the images for the screen from the script were also agents for this mimicry as their non-Western experiences influenced how they also read and represented the hegemonic Western cowboy image. Ang Lee is an 'Eastern' Taiwanese national whose film work straddles Chinese/Taiwanese and English cultures. Lee works wholly within both cultures, yet it was his

English-subtitled film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) that positioned him as a serious contender (winning four Academy Awards, including Best Director). He is described, somewhat colonially in the popular press, as a 'gentle', 'introspective' auteur who chooses his co-artists on films. His choice of cinematographer for BBM was a 'Southern' Mexican Rodrigo Prieto who created the visual silences and starkness of BBM (and who incidentally, has a cameo as the male prostitute chosen by Twist in a Mexican alleyway in the film). In interviews about the film, Gyllenhaal and Ledger both intimate the ambivalence they felt was an aspect of how Lee worked with them; that Lee's mixture of benevolence and manipulation was challenging and mysterious. Nowhere have I been able to ascertain that the actors believe Lee's 'difference' was attributed directly to his Taiwanese heritage. If anything, interviews suggest their awareness of not stating this as a mark of respect, but also as an understanding of their whiteness in the production event. Mostly they seemed to be in awe of Lee's particular way of 'reading' the film-making process. Gyllenhaal specifically described his and Ledger's apparent disbelief at seeing the final cut of the film; it was particularly *not* what they expected from their own perception of their performances on site (Cavagna, 2005a). They suggest there was an ambiguity in the process of filming scenes. Lee is quoted as saying that it was the "unfamiliarity" of the narrative that was attractive to him; presumably the unfamiliarity of how his perceived 'Otherness' might affect the colonial discourse around The Western genre (Cavagna, 2005b). Lee also told reporter Howard Feinstein (2005) from *The Advocate* that "people say I twisted the Western genre in *Brokeback*. I think I untwisted it" (p. 73).

And yet, the active mimicry of the straight/queer cowboy is mirrored in the mimicry of the Western genre by the postcolonial perspectives of non-American, non-white males from East (Lee) and South of the West (Prieto) who developed the aesthetic for the film. This mimicry is invisible to the audience as they deliberately set out to reconstruct a seamless Western and not 'make-obvious' either their postcolonial mimicry nor their mimicry of the hetero-cowboy (which is almost like, but not). Characters in BBM are never in opposition to the film's heterosexual life, their queerness exists in an ambivalent parallel to it because they are complicit within its construction, so there is no overt binary opposition to heterosexuality; the film maintains a sense of naturalness about the

American West which 'menaces' our thinking about what constitutes cowboy-masculinity. John Ford could not have made this film. The postcolonial disruption and queering lies in the mimicry (importantly not mockery) of the colonial Western genre; it exists in how close to the genre BBM is so that a complex reading of Gyllenhaal and Ledger's actual, fictional and celebrity bodies results in rendering a "visibility of mimicry" that explores how "historically contingent, constantly in flux and open to contestation" (Petersen, 2003, p. 64) male embodiment is. Homi Bhabha says that this visibility is "always produced at the site of interdiction, that is, a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which... must be kept concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them... mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (1994, p.86; 89).

Gyllenhaal and Ledger's actual corporeal bodies undertake a silent contract with the director to visibly render the characters' sexual relationship visible for the consuming audience. There's an aspect to the process of acting that demands an intimacy, compliance, and embodiment within the fiction that is unlike any other performance product. Ang Lee certainly suggested that this was achieved in his description of the intimacy between the actors in the tent scene as one that crossed over into a "private moment" that he felt he saw from his hand-held camera when filming (Cavagna, 2005b). The actors also suggested that the most vulnerable scenes for them were simultaneously fictional and actual in that their commitment to the mimicry did transgress into corporeal reality; a sense of leaping into the fiction as reality where the celebrity body slips away. The intimacy between the actors and the director suggests a transcendence of the fiction that, like the actual cowboys from the 19th century, remains silent and coded for them as a site of interdiction. Chris Packard (2006) suggests that these kinds of constructed moments allow for an acceptable queering in that context, where what he calls "situational homosexuality" is the kind practiced in all-male environments (prisons, football tours, military, etc.) to varying degrees; its interdiction is the locus of the queering and mimicry processes at work inside the making of BBM.

The research of sociologist Robert Heasley on *Queer Masculinities of Straight Men* (2005) has also produced a typology of queer-straight males involving five (fluid) categories (2005, p.

314): straight sissy boys; social-Justice straight-queers; elective straight-queers (or the elective queer); committed straight-queers; and males living in the shadow of masculinity. He states that these categories help address the slippage around straight men who appear 'queer' because they actively disrupt heteronormativity and are problematic as 'Others' but, he argues, not necessarily in direct opposition to 'straight' (almost like, but not quite); they queer the notion of queer and straight because, paradoxically, there is no language (interdiction again) available to discuss how straight men can disrupt dominant masculine paradigms (Heasley, 2005, p. 311). Heasley's proposition of the Elective Queer seems to encompass queer performances by straight men for the purpose of temporarily liberating the self from the constrictions of heteronormative expectation. They bring their "queer wardrobe into everyday life", but nonetheless return to "straight" without losing power in the dominant culture (2005, p. 316). In true celebrity re-invention, subsequent film projects for Ledger and Gyllenhaal after BBM were *Casanova* (2005) and *Jarhead* (2005), both hyper-masculine portrayals of heterosexually-charged masculinity that may well have served to re-establish a heteronormative gaze upon their work and avoid any labels of 'gayness' that may have lingered from their BBM experience.

Conclusion

We can never know for sure the effect of this elective queering process upon the actual bodies of the actors in BBM. The notion of a contrived 'elective queerness' suggests the actor-celebrity body can only remain a fraudulent pretence that possesses little potency as a disruptive tool upon the hegemonic processes presumably inside the movie-making industry. However, it is the visibility of straight celebrities representing America's 'official emblem of masculinity' (Packard, 2006, p. 13) as a gender conundrum that simultaneously exists in and subverts the dominant colonial hegemony. The queering in BBM takes place at the level of rendering visible the interdiction between male-male partnerships from the American West cowboy traditions, thus opening an aperture to stall and expose myths of colonial masculinity (Heasley, 2005). Del Mar and Twist are fictional characters whose construction does not mock the West, but rather their West-ness necessarily remains intact (even when it is clear that the price of overt queerness is death) so that the resemblance of 'stability'

invested in the West becomes brittle upon exposure. There's little doubt in my mind that a film like BBM which was initially destined for only limited release in the USA (the producers perhaps nervous as to how it would be received) crossed over into a mainstream audience specifically because of the masculinised celebrity bodies that Gyllenhaal and Ledger brought to the film. The mimicry at the core of the postcolonial disruption to the Western order is also queer because the mode of delivery of this ambivalence imbedded in the story, as well as in the film making process, is through the unstable agent of 'the celebrity' that affects our reading of the fictional and actual body on film. As a colleague said to me recently: "let's face it, who doesn't want to see two gorgeous boys snogging!?" The voyeuristic eye that consumes the celebrity body (as well as the film's Western genre) made the film's fiscal success, and not any altruistic notions by the filmmakers to reveal a Hollywood empathy for gay cowboy stories.

Author Note

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IS THERE ANY RATIONAL BASIS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF BARRIERS AGAINST SAME-SEX PARENTING? AN ANALYSIS OF AUSTRALIAN ADOPTION AND FAMILY LAW

PHILLIP DUFFEY

Introduction

Contestations over parenting by same-sex attracted people are often at the heart of negative community attitudes towards same-sex attracted people more broadly. The issue of same-sex parenting looks set to become one of the many decisive issues in this year's federal election, with the proposed introduction of the Family Law (Same Sex Adoption) Bill into Federal Parliament. Suspicion of same-sex attracted people raising children is evident within existing Australian Law, and will become more so if such legislation is passed. This paper attempts to identify whether there is any rational basis for the existence of barriers against same-sex parenting. Firstly, in identifying current laws that pertain to same-sex parenting (namely in regards to adoption law and parenting orders), the barriers that currently exist for same-sex parents under Australian Law and its judicial processes will be illustrated. The rationale behind the imposition of such barriers will then be outlined, specifically focusing on what are identified as the presumed perceived risks inherent to same-sex parenting. These perceived risks will be contrasted with reference to the extensive sociological and psychological research on the matter, which clearly establishes the lack of negative, and indeed many positive, factors associated with same-sex parenting. Finally, this paper will attempt to explain why these well-documented truths regarding same-sex parenting are not represented in the law, and will explore the possibility of reform in the foreseeable future.

Australian Family Law: The Current Situation

In the past eight years, bans on same-sex couples adopting have been overturned in Western Australia, Tasmania and the ACT,¹ with

NSW recently reviewing its ban on the matter² and Queensland's adoption system also being reviewed.³ Such reforms come as a result of recognition of the fact that "research over the past 30 years has consistently demonstrated that children raised by gay or lesbian parents exhibit the same level of emotional, cognitive, social and sexual functioning as children raised by heterosexual parents" (APA, 2002). Therefore, if discriminatory legislation such as that proposed by the Australian Federal Government in regards to overseas adoption is passed,⁴ it will not only impinge on individual states' jurisdiction on adoption and go against the reforms illustrated in several Australian states and territories, but it will also go against the vast majority of sociological and psychological research on the matter.

Under Australian Law, recognition of same-sex relationships, both spousal and familial, is currently still far from a legal reality. While the Family Court and several states' adoption legislation have made some inroads towards recognising the rights of same-sex attracted people to adoption, same-sex attraction continues to be stigmatised both in the courts and more so in legislation. As Millbank suggests; "lesbian and gay families have considerably less access to justice than their heterosexual counterparts" (Millbank, 1998, p. 1) In the Family Law context, same-sex families face many obstacles. For those wanting to start a family, or legitimise their existing family through adoption processes, this is made all but impossible through the Australian adoption system. For those trying to gain custody of

¹ S39(2) *Adoption Act 1994* (WA), s20(1) *Adoption Act 1988* (TAS), s18(1)(b) *Adoption Act 1993* (ACT).

² NSW Department of Community Services, *Review of the Adoption Act 2000*, Report to Parliament (October 2006).

³ QLD Government, Department of Child Safety, *Adoption Legislation Review*. Retrieved 20 March 2007 from <http://www.childsafety.qld.gov.au/legislation/adoption/review.html>.

⁴ Family Law (Same Sex Adoption) Bill. The brief explanation for the Bill's purpose is to amend the Family Law Act 1975 to indicate that adoptions by same sex couples of children from overseas under either bilateral or multilateral arrangements will not be recognised in Australia.

children in instances such as after a break-up from a heterosexual relationship, same-sex parents again have to contend with the ever-present assumption that their sexual identity is in some way or another dangerous to children. As will be illustrated, this assumption is evident in adoption legislation, judicial opinions and even anti-discrimination legislation, yet has no foundation in empirically based research on the matter.

Adoption Law in Australia

Unlike parenting orders dictated in the Family Court, the adoption process in Australia is administered by the states and territories. Each state, with its own legislation, regulates who can adopt, who is adopted, and what countries will be accepted for intercountry adoptions. In the past, adoption law neither facilitated nor obstructed adoption by same-sex attracted people, "as this was simply outside the contemplation of legislators at that time" (O'Halloran, 2006, p. 243). However, from the 1960's onwards, states and territories across Australia began to amend their adoption legislation to ban same-sex couples from adopting. This had been the case throughout Australia until recently, where in the past eight years bans on same-sex couples adopting have been overturned in Western Australia, Tasmania and the ACT.

Adoption in Australia peaked in the 1970s and since then, as within all other western societies, has steadily declined (O'Halloran, 2006, p. 244). The number of adoptions in Australia has declined to a number that is less than 5% of what it was in the 1970's⁵. This is mainly due to a shift in public policy and community attitudes towards single parents, unmarried mothers, family planning, sex education and the advent of the contraceptive pill.⁶ Because of these factors, it is now intercountry adoptions that are the predominant form of adoption in Australia.

Every country that Australia currently has agreements with regarding intercountry adoptions, does not allow adoption by same-sex couples.⁷ Effectively, one could say that all the

Family Law (Same Sex Adoption) Bill will do is simply confirm in Australia what is already the case in other countries. But this isn't necessarily the case.

The Family Law (Same Sex Adoption) Bill may affect what we know as 'known-child adoptions'. In cases where one partner of a same-sex couple outside of Australia has adopted a child which is already the legal child of the other partner, or for same-sex couples who have jointly adopted a child they already care for outside of Australia, the proposed legislation may mean that as soon as these families walk through Australian customs, the child will cease to have two legal parents, and one of the parents will cease to have any legal rights or responsibilities for the child. This could also be the case for 'stranger adoptions' (adoptions of a child that is unknown to the parents) that have occurred overseas in countries that allow adoption by same-sex couples. (Croome, 2007)

Whether the proposed legislation will extend to regulate these adoptions is unclear. While this was the original concern of critics (e.g., Bartlett, 2007; Croome, 2007), the Attorney General, Phillip Ruddock informed Senator Bartlett that this will not be the case and that the legislation will only regulate adoptions from those countries Australia has agreements with. However, whether the government will keep their word on this matter will only be realised when the legislation is introduced into parliament.

The Hague Convention is the cornerstone for intercountry adoption in Australia, and provides the principles and conditions under which participating countries operate.⁸ Despite the fact that adoption is within the jurisdiction of the states and territories, section 111C(1) of the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) gives the Commonwealth jurisdiction to make regulations allowing Australia to meet its obligations under the Hague Convention. However, clause 34 of the *Family Law (Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption) Regulations (1998)* allows the states and territories to pass their own legislation that adheres to the convention, and in such cases, the Commonwealth regulations do not apply. This arrangement is consistent with the Commonwealth's non-interventionist policy in the Commonwealth

⁵ Commonwealth: House Standing Committee on Family & Community Services, *Overseas Adoption in Australian: Report on the inquiry into adoption of children from overseas* (21 Nov 2005) Chapter 1; Introduction, clause 1.2

⁶ HSCFCS Report, Chapter 1, Introduction, clause 1.3

⁷ Department for Community Development, WA, *Adoption Eligibility Criteria*. Retrieved 2 April, 2007, from,

<http://www.community.wa.gov.au/Resources/Adoption/AdoptingChild/>

⁸ HSCFCS Report, Chapter 2, The legal framework for overseas adoptions, clause 2.1

State MOU.⁹ However, as will be discussed later, the recommended renegotiation of the Commonwealth-State Agreement may end up giving much more power to the Federal Government in regards to intercountry adoption.

As such, and as O'Halloran (2006) suggests; "Adoption has always had a political dimension. Its potential use to achieve political aims has been evident throughout history and in many different cultures" (p. 1). For example, what was at times represented as 'legal adoption' in regards to Indigenous children removed from their families in Australia was in actuality the government's use of illegal adoption (or child theft) to further its policies of assimilation against indigenous people, the devastating effects of which have come to be known within the extensive literature and litigation as the 'Stolen Generation'.¹⁰

Nowadays, the Federal Government appears adamant not to assimilate, but to separate same-sex attracted people from the community at large. This is evidenced by the introduction of *The Marriage Amendment Act 2004* (Cth) and the continual failure to implement the promised reforms of superannuation law to recognise same-sex relationships. Now, under a façade of attempting to 'streamline' the intercountry adoption process in Australia, the Federal Government looks set to once again use adoption as a means of achieving their political aims. As Senator Andrew Bartlett (2007) suggests; "to use children and their relationship with their adopted parents as political pawns in an election year is setting a new low."

State and Territory Law on Adoption

Queensland

Queensland has perhaps the most discriminatory 'eligibility criteria' in the adoption process, still using its legislation from the 1960's; *The Adoption of Children Act 1964* (Qld). Adoption by a same-sex couple is prohibited in Queensland, as section 12(1) of the *Adoption of Children Act 1964* specifies that an adoption order can only be made in favour of a husband and wife jointly. Adoption by a single person who identifies as same-sex attracted is,

however, theoretically possible under section 12(3)(c) of the Act, providing that singles may adopt special needs children or in exceptional circumstances. However Clause 7(2)(d) of the *Adoption of Children regulation 1999* overrules this provision, stating that applicants must have been 'married' for at least two years, effectively prohibiting adoption by a single same-sex attracted person. In order to alleviate the legal concerns of a regulation attempting to override an act of parliament, section 13AC was also inserted into the *Adoption of Children Act 1964*.¹¹

New South Wales

In NSW section 27 of the *Adoption Act 2000 NSW* permits a single person to adopt in a situation where the Court is satisfied that the particular circumstances of the child make an adoption order to a single person desirable. Section 28 of the Act allows "two persons who are a couple"¹² to adopt, however it is noted in the act that the term couple is to be given its dictionary meaning of "a man and woman who are married or have a de facto relationship,"¹³ effectively prohibiting a same-sex couple from adopting in NSW. A review of this ban was completed in late 2006, but disappointingly gave inconclusive recommendations for reform.

Victoria

In Victoria, the *Adoption Act 1984* requires that an adoption order can only be made in favour of a man and woman jointly who have been together for more than two years.¹⁴ Single applicants can adopt under circumstances where the Court is satisfied that special circumstances exist in relation to the child¹⁵, usually being children with special needs. However there does not appear to be an explicit prohibition on the single person being same-sex attracted in such circumstances. Recent recommendations by the Victorian Law Reform Commission in regards to same-sex adoption have been presented to the government who it is hoped will consider amending relevant laws.¹⁶

⁹ HSCFCS Report, Chapter 2, The legal framework for overseas adoptions, clause 2.26

¹⁰ e.g., *Kruger v Commonwealth* (1997) 190 CLR 1; *Cubillo and Another v Commonwealth* [No 1] (1999) 89 FCR 528

¹¹ HSCFCS Report, Chapter 1, Introduction, clause 3.14

¹² s28(1) *Adoption Act 2000* (NSW)

¹³ s23(1) note, *Adoption Act 2000* (NSW)

¹⁴ s11(1) *Adoption Act 1984* (VIC)

¹⁵ s11(3) *Adoption Act 1984* (VIC)

¹⁶ See <http://www.rainbowfamilies.org.au> for more information on these proposed changes.

South Australia

The *Adoption Act 1988* (SA) stipulates that an adoption order can only be made in favour of a couple who have been married for more than 5 years,¹⁷ however the 5 year limit will be relaxed where the Court feels there are 'special circumstances'.¹⁸ The stipulation that the couple be married expressly excludes the inclusion of same-sex couples. There does appear to be scope however for a single same-sex attracted person to adopt as a single person, who may be allowed to adopt where the Court feels there are special circumstances justifying the order.¹⁹

Western Australia

The Western Australian adoption criterion does give scope for both a single person²⁰ and two persons jointly²¹ to adopt, with no exclusion on same sex applicants. It has recently been reported that a gay male couple has successfully adopted a child in WA, believed to be the first domestic 'stranger adoption' by a gay couple in Australia (AAP, 2007).

Tasmania

Section 20(1) of the *Adoption Act 1988* (TAS) allows adoption by a couple who have a recognised significant relationship under Part 2 of the *Relationships Act 2003* (TAS). As this act does recognise same-sex relationships, adoption is allowed by a same-sex couple in Tasmania. Section 20(4) also allows adoption by an individual where 'exceptional circumstances' exist, making no prohibition on that person identifying as same-sex attracted.

Australian Capital Territory

The ACT allows couples to adopt who have been in a relationship for more than 3 years,²² with the ban on same-sex couples being lifted in 2004 despite strong opposition from the Federal Government in doing so (Grattan, 2004). Single persons are also given scope to adopt under the *Adoption Act 1993*.²³

Northern Territory

The Northern Territory does not allow adoption by same-sex couples, expressly stating that adoption by a couple is that between a man and a woman.²⁴ Adoption by a single person may be made in the Northern Territory in circumstances that, in the opinion of the Minister, exceptional circumstances exist that make it desirable to do so.²⁵

Federal Law and Adoption

The eligibility criteria expressed in the majority of the states' adoption legislation provides a clear example of a presumption against same-sex parenting. The criteria has been criticised on the grounds that it is incompatible with anti-discrimination legislation, not just on the grounds of discriminating on sexuality, but also on age, marital status, and impairment (O'Halloran, 2006, p. 241). As evidenced by the fact that only one domestic adoption of an unknown child by a gay couple has succeeded to this day, it is not just the discriminatory eligibility criteria that create barriers to adoption by same-sex couples, but also the attitudes of the biological parents of the child. In many of the local adoption programs, it has been found that birthparents often make a specific request that their child be placed with adoptive parents in a heterosexual relationship. This has the effect of dramatically reducing the chances for same-sex couples successfully adopting even in the few jurisdictions that currently allow same-sex couple adoption.

It is of course important to acknowledge the complex racialised and classed dimensions of both intra- and inter-country adoption. Those who place children up for adoption often do so as a result of the social discrimination faced as marginalised group members, or as a result of living in countries who face extreme disadvantage as a result of their location outside of the overdeveloped West. Critical race theorists in particular have long elaborated the complex power relations that shape adoptions and which continue to impact upon outcomes for both adoptive children and their birth parents (e.g., Eng, 2003).

In regards to adoption legislation, a review has recently been completed in NSW, and one is currently underway in Queensland. The review

¹⁷ s12(1) *Adoption Act 1988* (SA)

¹⁸ s12(2) *Adoption Act 1988* (SA)

¹⁹ s12(3)(b) *Adoption Act 1988* (SA)

²⁰ S39(1) *Adoption Act 1994* (WA)

²¹ S39(2) *Adoption Act 1994* (WA)

²² S18(1)(b) *Adoption Act 1993* (ACT)

²³ S18 *Adoption Act 1993* (ACT)

²⁴ S13(1) *Adoption of Children Act* (NT)

²⁵ S14(1)(b) *Adoption of Children Act* (NT)

in NSW was statutorily required²⁶ and specifically dealt with the issue of including same-sex couples as prospective adopting parents, but disappointingly gave inconclusive recommendations. The basis for the review in Queensland appears to be a more reactionary review based on the Federal Government sanctioned report²⁷; *Overseas Adoption in Australian: Report on the inquiry into adoption of children from overseas*.

In 2005, the House of Representatives' Standing Committee on Family and Human Services were commissioned to undertake a report into how the Federal Government could better streamline intercountry adoptions in Australia. The report; *Overseas Adoption in Australian: Report on the inquiry into adoption of children from overseas* gave 27 recommendations directed to the Federal Government. However, as it is the State and Territory Governments that currently deliver all domestic and intercountry adoptions, the report's recommendations impact on their jurisdiction on the matter.²⁸ Among other things, the report recommended that;

In renegotiating the Commonwealth-State Agreement, the Commonwealth shall ensure a greater harmonisation of laws, fees and assessment practices, including:

- More general principle based criteria in legislation;
- More robust, transparent and documented practices; and
- Standardised assessment across the jurisdictions.²⁹

The report further recommends that in order to ensure 'a greater harmonisation of laws;' "Responsibility for establishing and managing overseas adoption programs be transferred to the Attorney General's Department in consultation with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and The Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs."³⁰

Although the report identified the inconsistency regarding eligibility of same-sex couples for

intercountry adoptions³¹, it did not make *any* specific recommendations on streamlining either a universal prohibition on it, or a universal acceptance. However, if passed through parliament, the Family Law (Same Sex Adoption) Bill will ensure that this will become the case.

The issue of same-sex parenting, however, is not just confined to Adoption Law, but is also stigmatised in other areas of Family Law governed by the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth). In order to gain a comprehensive picture on how Australian Family Law regards same-sex parenting, it must also be established how the issue is dealt with in regards to parenting orders, and how this is implemented in the Family Court.

The Family Law Act and Same-Sex Parenting

Unlike Adoption Law, the law regarding parenting orders is dealt with at a federal level, adhering to the *Family Law Act*. At first glance, the Family Court and the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) do not expressly discriminate against same-sex parents. Nowhere in the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) is there a definition of 'the family' that could be seen to exclude same-sex relationships from the family unit. As Millbank (1998) states:

It is notable that the Family Court has never in 20 years held that being a lesbian or a gay man is *in itself* evidence of inability to parent – as courts in England, the USA and Canada have all done at one time or another in the past, and as some states in the USA continue to do to this day.³²

There are also no statutory barriers to non-biological parents being a party to an action under the Act, and the Family Court has the power to make parenting orders in favour of parents and "any other person concerned with the care, welfare or development of the child".³³

Many argue that the "lack of definition [of the family unit in the Family Law Act] could be seen in itself to carry [different] messages; for instance, that we do not need to define the

²⁶ The *Adoption Act 2000* (NSW) required the Minister to report to parliament within 6 years on whether the Act was serving the best interests of the child.

²⁷ QDCS, Review.

²⁸ QDCS, Review.

²⁹ HSCFCS Report, Chapter 1, Introduction, clause 3.43

³⁰ HSCFCS Report, Chapter 1, Introduction, clause 5.100

³¹ HSCFCS Report, Chapter 3, Inconsistencies between state and territory approval processes, table 3.1

³² Millbank suggests that cases such as *In the Marriage of Spry* (1977) 30 FLR 537; FLC 90-271 are seen as authority for the view that there is no presumption against homosexuality in regards to parenting rights.

³³ ss 64C and 65C, *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth)

family because we already know what it is" (Parkinson & Behrens, 2003, p. 31). Section 43(b) of the Act requires courts to exercise, "the need to give the widest possible protection and assistance to the family as the natural and fundamental group unit of society...". While not expressly stating that this is to be regarded as the heterosexual nuclear family, the implication is evident in the use of words such as 'natural' and 'fundamental.' Such language resonates strongly with the language used by sociologists of the 1950s and 1960s, such as Talcott Parsons who trumpeted the family as the natural social group in society being that of the heterosexual nuclear family; mum dad and the kids. Such a definition would leave no room for alternate versions of the family, such as those headed by same-sex attracted people. This also becomes more evident when looking at the first consideration in section 43(a).

Section 43(a) ensures that when the Court is to make a parenting order, it "preserves and protects the institution of marriage".³⁴ With the passing of *The Marriage Amendment Act 2004* (Cth) in 2004, Prime Minister John Howard has ensured that the onus on the Family Court is thus to preserve a 'homosexual free' version of marriage. Whilst from a procedural point of view parenting orders in Australia don't appear to be too prejudiced toward same-sex parents, the systematic and ingrained culture of heterosexism in Australian Family Law becomes evident when exploring the biased and uninformed basis on which many parenting orders are made.

The Family Court and Same-Sex Parenting

The absence of any provisions in the Act dealing with same-sex parents in regards to parenting rights has had the effect of giving judges a very high level of discretionary power (Tauber & Moloney, 2002). As in adoption law, the Family Court is given the task of enforcing the 'welfare of the child principle',³⁵ ensuring that it must have regard to the whole spectrum of circumstances. Within this spectrum, identifying as a same-sex attracted parent has been consistently viewed as a risk to a child.³⁶

Although the Court has never expressly held that same-sex attraction is itself a bar to custody, it has always been seen as a possible negative factor. This is illustrated in the judgment in *Doyle*,³⁷ which stated that "homosexuality does require that the Court, even taking the most liberal view, to scrutinise the parent's way of life". Such views are also evident in the family reports used in Court. Research suggests that these reports rarely challenge statements linking negative outcomes with same-sex attraction, and do not refer to the extensive research challenging myths that link negative outcomes with children raised by same-sex parents (Tauber & Moloney, 2002).

The fact remains that the Family Court continues to view "lesbians and gay men as a threat to children's well being" (Millbank, 1998, p. 4). This is despite the fact that there is not "a single social scientist conducting and publishing research in the area of children's development who claims to have found that gay and lesbian parents harm children" (Cooper & Cates, 2006, p. 3). Millbank suggests that "It also seems that this data is often ignored or overlooked in favour of the speculative views of a counsellor, or welfare or psychiatric "expert", or indeed in favour of competing "common sense"' (p. 7).

The Perceived Risks of Same-Sex Parenting

The issue of same-sex parenting rights has always been fraught with significant controversy, as suggested by the NSW Minister for Community Services, in her claim that it "is an area of government policy that generates emotion on both sides of the debate" (cited in Pearlman & Morris, 2006). Examples of such (negative) emotions include those elaborated by institutions such as the Catholic Church, which suggests that all children have a right to a mother and father, stating that there is significant evidence about the benefits of marriage [and de facto heterosexual relationships] over same-sex partnerships in regards to raising children (see Pearlman & Morris for summary of this).

Yet it is not just conservative groups such as the Catholic Church who are opposed to same-sex parenting. Other critics include many

³⁴ s43(a), *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth)

³⁵ s65E, *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth)

³⁶ *In the Marriage of Doyle* (1992) 106 FLR 125; *A and J* (1995) 19 Fam LR 260

³⁷ *In the Marriage of Doyle* (1992) 106 FLR 125 at 277

legislators³⁸ and judges³⁹, along with a large proportion of the Australian population which is reported to hold considerable prejudice toward same-sex attracted people more broadly.⁴⁰ Many Australians, Prime Minister John Howard being a good example, simply state that gay parenting is not 'in the best interests of the child,' without outlining the specific concerns that they have. While groups like the Catholic Church may rely upon the assumptions that same-sex attractions go against their doctrine of beliefs, this also does not address the pragmatic concern as to why same-sex parenting cannot be in the best interest of the child. Perhaps one of the best examples of a comprehensive list of the perceived risks that many hold regarding same-sex parenting is that of the 8 Point test used by Baker J in the case of *In the Marriage of L*⁴¹ to decide whether or not to give custody to the lesbian mother of the child. Although the case is over 20 years old, the criteria have been relied upon in subsequent cases in the Family Court over the years,⁴² thus giving a good insight into judicial opinions on the topic. The list is as follows;

1. Whether children raised by their homosexual parent may themselves become homosexual, or whether such an event is likely.
2. Whether the child of a homosexual parent could be stigmatised by peer groups, particularly if the parent is known in the community as a homosexual.
3. Whether a homosexual parent would show the same love and responsibility as a heterosexual parent.
4. Whether homosexual parents will give a balanced sex education to their children and take a balanced approach to sexual matters.
5. Whether or not children should be aware of their parent's sexual preferences.
6. Whether children need a parent of the same sex to model upon.
7. Whether children need both a male and a female parent figure.
8. The attitude of the homosexual parent to religion, particularly if the doctrines, tenets and

beliefs of the parties' church are opposed to homosexuality.

Critical Analysis of the *Perceived Risks*

The first consideration of whether a child being exposed to 'homosexuality' would themselves become homosexual is perhaps the biggest concern critics of same-sex parenting have. Such an assertion suggests that children in same-sex families would identify as same-sex attracted themselves as a direct consequence of what is presumed to be the negative outcomes of a child's 'inability' to develop 'gender appropriate' behaviours, something that is purported to be an outcome of being raised without opposite-sex role models (being the sixth and seventh consideration on Baker J's list).

Criticism of such a claim is two fold; firstly it is a blatant assertion that being same-sex attracted is in itself undesirable, and as Riggs (2007) suggests, the idea that a child may identify as same-sex attracted is only problematic if identifying as same-sex attracted is itself seen as inherently bad. This is also the case in the assertion that a child needs a mother and father. Such assertions are only valid if we prioritise the concept of 'sex differences', and in particular, prioritise the traditional roles of both the 'mother' and 'father' in the understanding of the concept of family (see Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Kitzinger, 2005 for summaries of this critique and Kelly, 2002, for a summary of the legal implications of the enforcement of the assertion that a mother and father are required).

Even if debates over opposite-sex role models are accepted as the premise for denying parenting rights to same-sex attracted people, some studies have found that "adult children of lesbians and gays [show] *no difference* in the proportion of those children who identified as lesbian or gay themselves, when compared with children of similarly situated heterosexual parents" (Millbank, 1998, p. 3). In other cases where the children of same-sex parents have indeed identified as same-sex attracted themselves or have showed an openness to explore same-sex relationships, research has suggested that this occurs as a result of living in a family context that allows for an increased awareness of choice surrounding 'compulsory heterosexuality', rather resulting from pressure or expectation from same-sex parents (e.g., Tasker & Golombok, 1997).

³⁸ Most notably our Prime Minister John Howard; "I am against gay adoption, just as I'm against gay marriage" quoted in Grattan (2004).

³⁹ Examples are evident in judgements of *In the Marriage of L* (1983) FLC 91-353., *W v G* (1996) 20 Fam LR 49

⁴⁰ In 2004, a Newspan released by SBS World News stated that only 38% of respondents were in favour of gay couples being given the being given the same rights to marry as couples consisting of a man and a woman."

⁴¹ *In the Marriage of L* (1983) FLC 91-353.

⁴² *In the Marriage of Doyle* (1992) F.L.C. 90-286; see Millbank (1998) p. 5.

The second consideration on Baker J's above list is another popular myth surrounding same-sex parents and is reiterated in Murray J's consideration in the case of *Spry*, suggesting:

community attitudes towards homosexuality have, fortunately, changed over the recent years, but not... to such a degree as to ensure that the children will have freedom from spiteful comment from their peer group who may be influenced by the attitudes of their parents.⁴³

Tasker and Golombok's (1997) research, however, suggests otherwise. Their longitudinal research which spanned 15 years comparing the children of lesbian single mothers to those of heterosexual single mothers illustrated among other things that "the children of lesbian mothers were no more likely than children of heterosexual mothers to be teased or ostracised, experience anxiety or depression, or feel unhappy or embarrassed about their mother's lesbian relationship" (Millbank, 1998, p. 4).

A recent review for the Australian Psychological Society (Short, Riggs, Perlesz, Brown & Kane, 2007) suggests that whilst some children in same-sex headed families do indeed experience discrimination, such children "like their parents, develop a range of strategies to prevent being stigmatised, discriminated against, or treated poorly". As Riggs (2007, see also Short et al., 2007) points out, the problem in dealing with an issue of discrimination by dominant group members by diagnosing the problem as lying with the marginalised group members who experience it is that this approach only serves to reinforce the legitimacy of such discrimination: it does very little to examine how discrimination is enshrined in social institutions including the law. Polikoff (2006) agrees with this assertion, pointing out that stories involving ostracisation by peers and the community towards children of same-sex families is often exaggerated and only serves to reinforce "derogatory attitudes against gay men and lesbians... [thus inviting] courts [to] place a state imprimatur on the very prejudice that facilitates harassment."

Tasker and Golombok (1997) also suggests that the more open, positive and political the parent is about their sexual identity, the more likely it is that their children will be accepting and positive about their family identity. Ironically, this stands in direct contrast to the view often held by the Family Court (and the fifth consideration in

Baker J's list), namely that it may be in the best interests of the child for same-sex parents to keep their sexual identity hidden from their children.⁴⁴

The third factor in Baker J's list, considering whether a same-sex parent would show the same 'love and affection as a heterosexual parent' is, as Millbank (1998) suggests, "offensive... and the very real fear it raises is that the humanity of lesbian and gay parents will be denied by the legal system" (p. 1). In fairness it must be noted that Baker J did give custody to the lesbian mother in deciding the case, dismissing many of the factors he used in deciding the potential impact that the mother's sexuality could have on the child. However this is irrelevant to the real issue, which is the very fact that such a high onus is placed upon same-sex parents to prove how 'similar' they are to the heteronorm. It also serves to mask the many aspects of same-sex parenting that are different from that of the heteronorm, many of which may indeed be beneficial to children.

Focusing on the *Actual* Benefits of Same-Same Parented-Families

In the process of adoption and cases involving decisions on awarding parenting rights to same-sex parents, the onus has consistently been put on such parents to prove their worthiness in comparison to heterosexual parents. The starting point has always been that of the heteronorm, and has thus led to much of the earlier research surrounding same-sex parenting to be based upon comparisons between same-sex and heterosexual families. Whilst this can, as Riggs (2006) rightly points out, reinforce the assumption that the heterosexual nuclear family is the perfect model to which same-sex parents should aspire, this comparative research has served one beneficial end, namely that:

the negative assumptions about families other than those of heterosexual married parents have been extensively empirically investigated, and researchers have been able to distinguish between family factors that *do* contribute to children's outcomes and well-being, and those that, in and of themselves, *do not* (Short et al., 2007).

One of the benefits gained for children raised in same-sex parented families is that such parents are more likely to share parenting duties equally

⁴³ Murray J (1977) 30 FLR 537, para 5

⁴⁴ *A and J* (1995) 19 Fam LR 260

(see e.g., Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Patterson & Chan, 1999). This stands in contrast to the traditional structure of the heterosexual relationship, which has historically been one of ingrained power imbalance. "The sexual division of labour [in heterosexual relationships] remains substantially intact; at home and at work, in most contexts of modern societies, men are largely unwilling to release their grip upon the reigns of power" (Giddens, 1992, p. 132). Giddens suggests that same-sex relationships are most often not bound by such forms of gender inequality and are therefore more likely to result from negotiations between individuals, rather than simple adherence to social norms which govern marital relations.

Examples such as this overwhelmingly affirm that there is nothing to suggest that a same-sex parent would have a diminished parenting capacity in comparison to that of a heterosexual parent. As Patterson (1997) emphasises, "there is no evidence to suggest that lesbians and gay men are unfit to be parents or that psychosocial development among children of gay men or lesbians is compromised in any respect relative to that among offspring of heterosexual parents. Not a single study has found children of gay or lesbian parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents" (cited in Tauber & Moloney, 2002, p. 2).

Despite this, Australian Legislation and Australian Courts continue to perpetuate the perceived risks of same-sex parenting without consideration of the fact that the prevailing sociological and psychological research in Australia and overseas continues to assert that there are no inherent risks in same-sex parenting.

Conclusion

The fact of the matter remains that the politics of same-sex parenting, like that of same sex marriage, "involves moral judgements not easily influenced by the facts of social harm" (Eskridge & Spedal, 2006, p. 221). "Social psychologists have demonstrated that human judgement is strongly influenced by cognitive stereotypes and emotional prejudices that are resistant to what lawyers consider rational analysis and argumentation" (p. 222). In Haidt's (1997) extensive research on the matter of what he calls the 'discourse of disgust', he outlines how sexual taboos are particularly susceptible to

disgust-driven moral responses, rather than rationally based harm-driven response. This suggests that even with such strong and authoritative evidence demonstrating the lack of harm in sanctioning same-sex parenting (and indeed the potentially positive benefits associated with it), the moral response by many who are 'disgusted' by same-sex attractions will likely continue to be the dominant response. This is evidenced by both the reluctance to reform adoption law to remove prejudices against same-sex couples, and by the Family Court's continual failure to use the substantive and authoritative research on same-sex parenting, instead opting for what they consider 'common sense.'

As the many barriers against same-sex parenting outlined in this paper illustrate, there is a broad assumption in Australian Family Law that same-sex parenting is not in the best interests of the child. This assumption has been shown to have no rational basis and is comprehensively disproved by the extensive research cited in this paper. While from a judicial point of view, attitudes towards same-sex parenting appear to be changing, more effort needs to be taken to ensure that judicial decisions take the rational step of basing their evaluations on the facts regarding same-sex parenting, and not the myths.

It is important to note, however, as mentioned earlier, the power dynamics of adoption, both within and between countries. A growing body of research and testimonials by people who have experienced intercountry adoption (e.g., Willing, 2004; 2006) suggests that whilst there may be no rational basis for prohibiting any person from adoption, there is nonetheless a pressing need to examine how discourses of rationality are used to warrant the removal of children (in lieu of, for example, foreign aid to countries experiencing economic crisis). Adoption, despite 'positive' laws to afford access to a range of people, thus continues to be problematic for adopted children and their birth parents.

As Eskridge points out, like prejudices, feelings of disgust surrounding homosexuality are non-rational responses, yet can form the underlying motivation for our rational discourses. Such is the case with any kind of justification for the proposed legislation of the Federal Government. Whether the law can rise above the irrational presumptions surrounding same-sex parenting remains to be seen. As O'Halloran states, Adoption Law is "a mirror reflecting the changes

in our family life and the efforts of family law to address those changes" (2006, p. 7). Therefore, while the reality of the change may be apparent, the law will not reflect this without the social, and more importantly, political will to do so.

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BORDER CROSSINGS? QUEER SPIRITUALITY AND ASIAN RELIGION: A FIRST PERSON ACCOUNT

VICTOR MARSH

Abstract

As constructed by conservative religious discourse, homosexuality is antagonistic to spirituality, but in this paper I suggest how marginalised subjectivities might be liberated from toxic, homophobic discourses by 'border crossing': seeking out tools from other cultural traditions to access knowledge resources that can support the urgent inquiry into the nature of the self precipitated by its bruising encounter with institutionally entrenched homophobia. Since the 1960s many men in Western countries have looked 'East' for answers to their metaphysical concerns, counterbalancing what is often assumed to be the one-way process in which 'the West' exerts influence upon 'the Rest'. The subjective repositioning that takes place through such practice occurs not just in cultural spaces, but also within the zone of conscious awareness loosely called the 'mind' as it recovers its roots in a transcultural zone of being/not-being. For the purposes of my discussion I separate the term 'spirituality' from 'religion'. I see 'religion' as a sociological phenomenon, entailing inclusion in/exclusion from socially and politically valourised faith communities. I enlist the Zen Buddhist koan: "What was your face before your parents were born?" to deploy a usage of 'spirituality' as concerned with a searching enquiry into the nature of being, with an emphasis on empirical praxis rather than belief. From such an approach the construction of the personal self produced by political, social and linguistic constructs is radically re-configured, and the non-dual nature of these Asian approaches might allow for an accommodation of spirituality and sexuality.

Introduction

Professor David Halperin, speaking at the *Queer Asian Sites Conference* in early 2007, suggested that there is a pressing need to find a new language for positioning queer subjectivities without resorting to the often pathologising discourse of psychology. Drawing on Foucault, he spoke of the process of self-making as the ultimate act of freedom. In this paper, I want to suggest one way of producing a resistant re-narrativisation of queer subjectivities that has been pointedly avoided by queer theory until

now – one that opens up differently ordered pathways for queer intelligence to explore. I will do this by providing a first-hand account of the reclamation of certain spaces that had been occluded by the culture of my religious upbringing (spaces that were explicitly unauthorised by the discursive practices of the Church). I suggest that the language for the reclamation might be forged from new forms of 'spiritual' discourse and praxis, re-framed and detoxified of common religious associations.

Thus far I have achieved this in my own work via a two-pronged approach: firstly, by the disciplined and continuing practice of introspective meditation techniques taught to me by a guru of the Advaita Vedanta tradition of northern India; and, hand in hand with this, through the writing of a memoir, a work in progress titled *The Boy in the Yellow Dress*, which brings certain areas of experience out of the culturally sanctioned silence to which they had heretofore been banished.

As constructed by conservative religious discourse, homosexuality is supposed to be antagonistic to spirituality. As a counter to this I suggest – from personal experience and from the study of texts by other gay memoirists – how marginalised subjectivities might be liberated from homophobic religious discourse by 'border crossing': seeking out tools from other cultural traditions to access differently ordered pathways of being and becoming. To engage in such an approach, I offer a first person account of such an assertive repositioning to show how men such as myself have been able to draw on knowledge sources (not discursively constructed around notions of sin) that provide affirmative pathways for the expression of queer intelligence.

The Turn to the 'East'

In his memoir *Defying Gravity*, Dennis Altman writes about becoming aware of oneself as part of a larger social movement. In his words, "all our lives mirror to some extent the larger changes around us; we are shaped by larger social forces in ways we do not necessarily recognise at the time" (1997, p. 5). While Altman might have had other, political trends in

mind, I have come to recognise that it also applies in the conspicuous 'turn to the East' that began early in the twentieth century but became more pronounced in the 1960s and 1970s, when many men in Western countries started looking 'East' for answers to their metaphysical concerns, counterbalancing what is often assumed to be the one-way process in which 'the West' exerts influence upon 'the Rest'. In my own case, turning the geographical compass about, it was to the *North* towards which I looked for inspiration when I found myself suffocating within the heteronormative spaces of my upbringing in redneck West Australia.

With notions of self all too often dislocated by the exclusions attendant on homophobic religious discourse, some gay men have been drawn to the de-centring of the personal self common in Buddhist philosophy and practice. In fact, as I describe elsewhere (Marsh, 2006), the disillusionment that gay men often go through – the dislocation from spaces of belonging produced by Family, Church, Law, and psychological Medicine – can be re-framed as a stripping away of illusions. Further, this process serves as a kind of initiation into a *via negativa*, to use the terminology of mysticism. In such a re-framing, alienation can serve as a kind of cultural 'de-programming', precipitating a searching inquiry into the nature of identity – a process that I propose typifies the 'spiritual' life of men in a queer relationship to heteronormative culture. This could be likened to the Buddhist notion of 'disenchantment', a shakedown that prepares the mind for a penetrating gaze into deeper layers of conscious awareness than are normally presented in the foreground of attention. For the shock of estrangement that results from the insult (Eribon, 2004) of homophobically produced notions of identity often goes further than mere psychological stress, pushing the crisis into a deeper ontological displacement. Struggling for oxygen, queer intelligence is compelled to seek out spaces for its survival and finds itself asking: 'If not this, then what am I?' Entire schools of rigorous spiritual practice begin with this inquiry, the Ramana Maharshi lineage being one potent example (Lata, 1986; Osborne, 1972).

Whereas Western psychotherapies might strive to shore up the security of the ego-centric 'I', spiritual practices more common in Asian religions view the destabilisation of the notion of a continuous self as a thoroughly necessary milestone on the path to 'Liberation'. (Parallels with deconstructive practice are not hard to

draw, and I deal with that comparison elsewhere; see Marsh, 2006.)

For the purposes of my discussion, I separate the term 'spirituality' from 'religion'. I'll deal briefly with the latter first. I see 'religion' as a sociological phenomenon, entailing inclusion in/exclusion from socially and politically valourised faith communities. Here I would enlist Peter Berger's (1969) description of the 'plausibility structures' which typically anchor the sense of belonging in community. "One of the fundamental propositions of the sociology of knowledge", writes Berger, is that the "plausibility" of views of reality "depends upon the social support these receive" (p. 50). According to his analysis, "we obtain our notions of the world originally from other human beings, and these notions continue to be plausible to us in very large measure because others continue to affirm them" (p. 50). "Plausibility structures" are produced by networks of people "in conversation", as he puts it, who hold to a common world-view and set of moral commitments which help to maintain beliefs. While acknowledging that "it is possible to go against the social consensus that surrounds us", Berger reminds us that there are "powerful pressures (which manifest themselves as psychological pressures within our own consciousness) to conform to the views and beliefs of our fellow men." (p. 50).

To continue in a sociological vein, Hans Mol discusses various propositions with regard to theories of identity that define it not as an individual thing alone but as also strongly social.¹ Mol cites Erik Erikson's work, in which identity connotes "both a persistent sameness within oneself and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others" (1976, p. 57) and he notes Berger and Luckmann's (1966) construction that identity is "a phenomenon that emerges from the dialectic between individual and society" (p. 174). Mol also cites Soddy's earlier (1957) definition of identity produced "as an anchorage of the self to the social matrix" (cited in Mol, p. 58). Mol argues that religion provides the mechanism "by means of which on the level of symbol systems certain patterns acquire a taken for granted, stable, eternal, quality" (p. 5), thus "sacralising" identity.

For a sub-set of gay men who feel rejected by the religion of their upbringing, the 'plausibility

¹ I am grateful to Michael Carden for pointing me to this work by Hans Mol.

structures', these 'anchorage points to the social matrix' – whether held together by ritual, mythic and symbolic functions, or as institutionalised discourses of meaning and power (in Foucault's analysis) – are not inclusive of them, unless they renounce their sexuality. The normalising functions of social cohesiveness and 'sacralised' identity that create a web of belonging and cohesiveness for some people, position men like me 'outside the fold'², and the reputed 'eternal quality' of a socially constructed self is radically *de*-stabilised.

Alan Watts – an early commentator on the East/West crossover I noted earlier – points to the nexus between the religious and the social in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, which "identifies the Absolute – God – with the moral and logical order of convention" (1957, p. 11). He describes this conflation as "a major cultural catastrophe", and critiques the manner in which "it weighs the social order with excessive authority" (p. 11). If Watts' analysis is correct, his corollary is particularly telling for people marginalised by this kind of construction:

It is one thing to feel oneself in conflict with socially sanctioned conventions, but quite another to feel at odds with the very root and ground of life, with the Absolute itself. (p. 11)

'God', in other words, is a very big stick to wield against others. Many gay men reading this in a Western cultural setting would recognise the promise of inclusiveness offered to them by religion is predicated on a denial of their sexuality, which is represented in the darkest possible tones and negatively sanctioned with the most powerful forces that discourse can muster.³

² Of course there are some who offer resistance and claim equal rights even in the churches. I refer to the work of Michael Kelly's Rainbow Sash movement in Australia; Andrew Yip's study *The Persistence of Faith* (2002), and memoirs by priests as varied as John J. McNeill (1998) and Bernard Duncan Mayes (2001), and earlier, Malcolm Boyd (1978; 1986), as vigorous examples of men struggling with the 'angel' *within* the Church. The point remains, however, that they are engaged in a struggle for a 'place at the table', to use Bruce Bawer's term (1994).

³ The misrepresentation of gay people by the Church has not subsided in recent times. Amanda Lohrey's recent study (2006) carries an account of her interviews with young university students who are 'evangelical' Christians and whose attitudes towards homosexuality still carry unreconstructed, moralistic and heteronormative assumptions.

So, if religion is deeply complicit in the perpetuation of the 'excessive authority' of the social order (Watts, 1957), I posit 'spirituality', on the other hand, as another kind of practice altogether. Let me illustrate this by enlisting the kind of interrogation posed by the standard Zen Buddhist *koan*: "What was your original face before your parents were born?" to deploy a usage of 'spirituality' as concerned, first and foremost, with a searching enquiry into the nature of being.

Koan practice is a particular technique within certain schools of Buddhism (see Murphy, 2004a), usually carried out in a formal relationship with a spiritual instructor, and accompanied by intensely focused meditation practice. For the Zen master to demand of the student: "Show me your original face before your parents were born" is, in its own context, a form of deconstructive practice that engages the inquiring intelligence in a probing investigation of the roots of its own existence. In this setting, the positioning of self produced by political, social and linguistic discourse is radically re-aligned in relationship to a more broadly based experience of being/awareness, and one that is not centred in the zone of what is usually taken to be the personal self. Rather than finding the roots of self in the complex social and political matrices of place, class, and gender, then, or in the narratives which emanate therefrom, or in the inherent constructedness of language itself, the question becomes: what is 'I' when all the usual predicates of identification fall away? The subjective repositioning that takes place through such practice occurs, *not* in cultural space, and *not* from "the dialectic between individual and society" (Berger & Luckmann, p. 174) but within the zone of conscious awareness loosely called 'mind', as it recovers its roots in a *transcultural* zone of being/not-being.

Tropes of 'emptiness' (Buddhist *shunyata*) are employed to evoke such states, and for Western practitioners sometimes that encounter with the 'Void' can be unsettling (see, for example, Conradi, 2004; Hamilton-Merritt, 1986). Rather than trying to define such a zone – we might call it a 'Ground of Being', as theologian Paul Tillich did, borrowing the concept from Vedanta – the emphasis is not on representation but on *praxis*, and the effect of the practice is to produce a shift in the axis of subjective experience, re-positioning the de-stabilised personal self in an inclusivist re-contextualisation. Conradi (2004) compares the Buddhist view of the self – as "not a fixed or changeless product, but a dynamic

process always seeking an illusory resting-place where it might finally become 'solid'" (p. 80) – with the predicament of the characters in Samuel Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot*. He sees Didi and Gogo and the others as:

the lonely individual struggling to talk into permanent existence, maintain and freeze something essentially fluid and contingent. Neither Godot nor a solid self will come to save us. This self (ego) spends much time trying to establish personal territory, a nest or cocoon, to defend. (p. 80)

To pick up on my point about gay men's 'disillusionment' process, when that shakedown precipitates a searching inquiry into the nature of being, such a process can be re-framed as a 'spiritual' initiation, as I am using the term; even, perhaps, making it easier for queer folk to 'see through' the contingent nature of socially and discursively produced identities. To push my argument further, the 'liberation' ideal of a 'gay liberation' could be re-framed under the broader rubric 'Liberation', as the term is used in Asian religions. And, if that were true, even in their disillusionment, gay men could be read as 'wounded healers', spiritual teachers, 'way-showers' for others⁴ (but that perhaps, would be courting grandiosity).

Identity as Narrative

I would like to extend my discussion of the destabilisation of conventional constructs of identity with a brief look at the rise of narrative theory as it applies to the theorising of self. Recent theorists of autobiography have brought together a postmodern analysis, whereby the self is seen as a narrative construct, with new approaches to theories of self derived from the neurosciences. For example, in an article for the journal *Narrative*, Eakin (2004) picks up on the argument made by Damasio (1999) "that self is not an effect of language but rather an effect of the neurological structure of the brain" (Eakin,

2004, p. 125).⁵ Eakin tries to tackle the narrative identity thesis that is central to my own discussion: viz., that we are or could be said to be a *story* of some kind (Marsh, 2006, pp. 22ff). 'Autobiography', Eakin writes:

is not merely something we read in a book; rather as a discourse of identity, delivered bit by bit in the stories we tell ourselves day in and day out, autobiography structures our living. (p. 122)⁶

Eakin is prompted to pursue the line of enquiry into the equivalence between narrative and identity by a case study from the neurologist Oliver Sacks, and he uses a quote from Sacks as the epigraph for his article:

It might be said that each of us constructs and lives a 'narrative', and that this narrative *is* us, our identities. (p. 121, original emphasis)

Working in the social sciences, Jerome Bruner (1987) uses the same notion, writing that: "the self is a perpetually rewritten story". In the end, Bruner says, "we *become* the autobiographical narratives we tell about our lives" (p. 15, original emphasis).

Narrative theory has become a useful tool in many disciplines, including psychiatry⁷, for, if self is a 'story', it can be told differently, and psychotherapists have exploited the therapeutic potential of re-narrativisations of self. (The work of Michael White on 'narrative therapy' is an obvious example). For gay men, whose sense of self needs to be consciously re-narrativised to reclaim it from the toxic spaces to which it is relegated by homophobic discourse, such autobiographical acts are powerfully politically resistant.

⁵ Damasio's argument is spelled out in *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (1995) and developed in *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (1999).

⁶ His discussion provoked an ongoing debate in the journal (see Butte, 2005) but Butte's response doesn't address this same issue directly.

⁷ Take, for example, this statement from the 2006 annual conference of the Brisbane Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies: "The search for identity is a lifelong and inescapable challenge for every human being. It is evident in the consulting room, in the novel, in the fascination with biography and autobiography, and the unwitting unfolding of a life." The conference brought writers together with psychoanalysts and academics to "explore the construction of the narrative of human experience" in these various fields.

⁴ De La Huerta (1999), would make this case. Also, anthropologist Walter Williams (1992), whose study of the North American indigenous tradition of the *berdache* figure has inspired a generation of gay seekers, quotes an informant, a living Hawaiian *mahu*, as saying: "On the mainland [referring to the United States] the religion doesn't allow a culture of acceptance. Gays have liberated themselves sexually, but they have not yet learned their place in a spiritual sense" (p. 258).

I would like to illustrate this discussion with a personal example.

I am working on a memoir, *The Boy in the Yellow Dress*, in which I trace the life trajectory of a sissy boy growing up in Western Australia, who undergoes bruising encounters with Family, Church, Psychology and the Law. His descent into madness is arrested by an encounter with a young *guru* in the Advaita (non-dualist) Vedanta tradition who shows him that what he has been looking for can only be found within. Whereas the teaching of the church in the boy's own culture is predicated on a denial of his sexuality, the Advaita teaching allows for an accommodation of his sexuality with his spirituality, with increased life, rather than death, as the beneficial outcome.

I will provide a brief reading from the beginning of the memoir, and then extrapolate from that piece of text. The incident described here is probably my earliest memory, and occurred when I was three, or at most four years old.

Child's Play

In the formal sitting room, the curtains are drawn. Thick carpet and upholstered furniture muffle all sound. The boy seeks out this place to be alone. But first he goes into the room across the hall, to the wardrobe where his mother's dresses hang, awaiting their brief moments of coming to life (all fullness and motion, then).

He climbs up into the wardrobe to reach for one of these, which is special to him. It's dappled yellow, and it glows. He clammers down from the cupboard and slips the gown over his head. Hanging loose around him, its folds cascade lengthily onto the floor. Silky texture is cool where it skims his skin.

Women's voices murmur in the kitchen.

Suitably attired, the boy returns to the sitting room, where he twirls in the half light, gazing down at the skirt as it rises around him. Entranced by the golden glow, he settles down to sit on his heels and spreads the ample folds of fabric in a perfect circle around him on the floor.

Eyes closed, he rests in peace, ears singing in the silence. Dust motes float, lazy, in the light.

Sometime later, the dress is returned to its waiting place.

But one day when he reaches into the wardrobe the cool fabric isn't there to meet his touch. He wants to catch the magic feeling—wrap it around him, disappear. He tries the cupboard again, but even the most careful iteration of his actions fails to make the dress appear. Instead, there's only a heavy feeling dragging in his chest.

Another day: Playing in the wash-house, in the back yard. A copper tub squats above the fireplace where water is boiled to clean the clothes, on Mondays. Sifting through the ashes, he finds the charred remains of the dress... this lovely thing banished to dust in his hands, his magic carpet gone.

In the fowl run, a hen murmurs cluck cluck, slow, and the heavy feeling returns to roost in him. Inside the house, a door clicks shut.

*

What is the meaning of this child's play? Perhaps you would expect this will become the life story of a 'transvestite'. You would be right if you assumed that having the dress so thoroughly banished from his playmaking, he *is* left with a sense of loss, but what *is* it that he loses, and what will it take to restore him to wholeness? And what atavistic impulse led a boy to re-create a ritual more common in Siberian shamanism than in suburban West Australia?

At school, he is drawn to the intricate games with skipping ropes but, ears red with the shaming cry of 'sissy', he is shooed away, in the strictly segregated playground, to the *boys'* area, to be tortured by the bruising bounce of a cricket ball. Sex has not reared its ugly head yet (whatever Sigmund Freud might say). Gender certainly has, but rather than wanting to transform himself into a girl, or developing a fetish for dresses, what he yearns for is the state of undifferentiated unity which preceded this either/or bifurcation: if this, not that; you can't be both. Through gender, his exile from the place of peace – his 'homeland', you might call it – is complete.

I propose that in this remembrance, unity is the primary state. Gender could be described, then, as a secondary development (with sexuality as tertiary?). What is queer about the sissy boy is his perverse recall of, and yearning for, the lost

spaces of the self that the forces of cultural conditioning are configured precisely to make him forget.

Recalling this problem, I am reminded of the Sufi teaching story about the woman who loses the keys to her house. Her neighbour finds her searching around in the street and asks her:

What are you doing?
Oh, she says, I've lost my house keys.
The neighbour offers to help her look, but after an hour, when a dozen people have gathered, all intent on locating the lost keys, someone asks her:
Are you sure you lost them here?
Oh no, she says, I lost them inside the house.
Then why are you looking for them out here? they ask.
Why, because the light is better out here, of course, she exclaims.

If what has been lost is inside, how much energy might be wasted looking for the connection where it never was? In the case of this boy who wore the yellow dress, the dislocation is a real event within the psyche, and the *re*-location takes decades to achieve. As the narrative of the memoir unfolds, it becomes apparent that he will re-locate it, not by creating rituals with a fetishised yellow dress, nor through regressive practices in psychotherapy, but via the meditation practices in which he is trained by his guru.⁸

The 'Home' Self

British expatriate writer Christopher Isherwood (1971), an early, if mostly unrecognised exemplum of the queer spiritual autobiographer, wrote of this yearning as not so much a search for home, as for the 'home self'. Recalling the loss of identity experienced when he was packed off to an cold and impersonal boarding school, later Isherwood was able (after several decades of meditation practice) to write: "I suppose that this loss of identity is really much of the painfulness which lies at the bottom of what is called Homesickness; it is not Home that one cries for, but one's home-self" (p. 285).

The Persian devotional poet Rumi advises:

⁸ This essay does not allow me the space to deal with the potential problem of 'narcissistic regression', but I do intend to defend the practice against reductionist neo-Freudian representations in a later paper.

Once you have tied yourself to selflessness, you will be delivered from selfhood and released from the snares of a hundred ties, so come, return to the root of the root of your own self. (1994, p. 40)

The final line: "come, return to the root of the root of your own self" is repeated at the end of each verse. It seems that Rumi is saying that to be delivered from a certain set of identifications (from selfhood, in fact) is a kind of relief. Once again, whereas the focus in Western forms of therapy might be intended to shore up the sense of a well-defined ego, spiritual practices common in other cultures could be said to actively court the dissolution of the relatively 'illusory' construction.⁹

Back in childhood, the sissy boy, who lacks access to other ways of thinking about his condition, learns that he is not one of the 'real' people. He tries to fit in, hide the parts that don't fit, but for him there is, always, the sense of exile. In the place of the state of undifferentiated unity – that everyone else seems to want him to forget – he is taught that his instinct for re-union is downright pathological, that he is fundamentally flawed; and he learns to be ashamed. What the parents cannot see is that, rather than signifying a wrong-bodied desire to be a girl, the dress is a portal for re-entry into a pre-gendered, non-dualistic state of unified awareness.

He also learns other important 'facts' along the way, both within his family, where he feels like a cuckoo in the wrong bird's nest, as well as from the wider society, which labels him a freak. From Medicine he will learn that he is a pathology; from the Church, that he is an abomination (Hebrew 'toevah'); that to the Law he is an *outlaw*. Unable to love 'properly', he might even accept that he is some sort of biological error.

⁹ Notwithstanding this, the rot set in with the introduction of the Unconscious into Western psychoanalytic discourse; Freud's famous dictum that 'the ego is not master in its own house' was emblematic of the shift:

[M]an's craving for grandiosity is now suffering the third and most bitter blow from present-day psychological research which is endeavouring to prove to the 'ego' of each one of us that he is not even master in his own house, but that he must remain content with the veriest scraps of information about what is going on unconsciously in his own mind. (Freud, 1916-17, p. 285)

So he studies early the art of concealment, trying to 'pass' as one of the real people. He watches life as through a glass, and has no one to guide him through the maze of his own confusing feelings. If he persists in his perversity, he might have to learn to lead with his chin, turning himself into a rebel, thrusting his difference defiantly in the faces of his mockers. Or he might pick up on the chorus of 'eat, drink, and be merry...' and *make sure* that tomorrow he dies (an early death, in too many cases). 'If I am an error,' he reasons from his pain, 'I will rub myself out. I am not supposed to be here, anyway.'

Being so at odds with my own culture, with the values of my own family, and colonised by the hegemonic meanings of the social/political/religious matrix, more and more I found that it was my sexuality that seemed to mark me out. I had a choice: either to reject that sexuality, or, in an act of existential defiance, embrace it. But was this sexuality, as constructed within a very particular set of historical and cultural discursive circumstances, a sufficient basis around which to construct an identity? It was a very uncomfortable fit, to be sure, and in many ways it would prove downright dangerous.

According to Michel Foucault's (1978) analysis, "in the space of a few centuries, a certain inclination has led us to direct the question of what we are, to sex" (p. 78). Following Foucault's lead, I question what has been occluded by the practice of seeing things only through that lens, what other knowledge sources denied in the formation of a queer identity strictly around the axis of sexuality. I ask: Who is a 'homosexual' when he is not having sex? For my queer nature, as I have tried to suggest here, was in evidence *before* my desire first focused on other men. Sexuality was a secondary development of the real roots of my queerness, which I now locate in the perverse longing for lost unity. Meanwhile, the space opened up shamanistically by the ritual with the dress remained unexplored, its resonances muted, its luminosity banished to the shadows.

Fromm's Filter

In his essay "Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism" (1960), psychoanalyst and cultural critic Erich Fromm wrote:

[E]xperience can enter into awareness only under the condition that it can be perceived, related and ordered in terms of a conceptual

system and of its categories. This system is in itself a result of social evolution. Every society, by its own practice of living and by the mode of relatedness, of feeling, and perceiving, develops a system of categories which *determines* the forms of awareness. This system works, as it were, like a socially conditioned filter...

and, he asserts, "*experience cannot enter awareness unless it can penetrate this filter*" (p. 99, emphasis added).

I would say that the categories of the dominant conceptual system not only placed the forms of my *sexual* expression out of bounds, but actually worked as a filter against me becoming aware of what I am now able to identify as the *real* roots of my queer nature, in this awareness of primary unity I accessed spontaneously through my cross-dressing child's play.

The incident with the dress was not an isolated event. Throughout my life I have been blessed (or cursed) with an urge to reconnect with this something that I felt I had lost, and my journey has been punctuated by moments of synchronous intrusion into mundane awareness by certain events which shifted me into what you might call 'altered states', like a 'tap on the shoulder' reminding me: there's something more. Memoir writing becomes a way of summoning from the silences of cultural occlusion experiences opened up through dreams, through synchronous interactions with the natural world, and spontaneous shafts of insight from some other, out-of-the ordinary frame of reference.

But these experiences were outside the conceptual system of 'social categories' (Fromm, 1960) in which I grew up. There was no reinforcement from the culture of my upbringing – neither from family, nor church, nor education – to assist me in interpreting the meaning of these moments. Many of them lingered with me as luminous talismans which have only slowly given up their significance when recollected in quiet retrospect, and usually not through rational analysis.

As these had to do with states that were not mediated by language, nor through social interactions, I classify them as a form of spontaneous spirituality. I acknowledge that such a discussion might cause concern for some queer academics who would ask: What is a gay man doing talking about 'religious' experience at all? Hasn't 'religious' discourse been the original

source of homophobic rhetoric? Religion and sexuality are uncomfortable bedmates at any time, and *homosexuality*, in the culture in which I grew up, was completely beyond the pale. Religion itself, indeed, was part of the filtering system described by Fromm that would not allow those experiences to which I have referred to even *enter into awareness*.

Writing a memoir has been a way of re-inserting experience from culturally sanctioned silence into awareness, in this present time. Some recent theoretical work on life-writing takes up this possibility. Smith and Watson (1996), for example, build a case for life-writing as a means of critical intervention into post-modern life. They identify autobiographical narrative as a 'performative' display and describe "the many means by which models of acceptable identity are circulated and renewed in society", analysing "how state, church, school, corporation, government and the advertising industry secure normative subjects in acceptable social relationships" (p. 12). There are echoes of Foucault here, especially the notions of 'technologies of power' and 'government'.¹⁰ In specific situations, Smith and Watson say, people may "choose not to narrate the stories that are prescribed for them", opting instead to "reframe the present by bringing it into a new alignment of meaning with the past" (p. 12).

Writing autobiographically, then, becomes a resistant strategy for re-narrativising the self, an assertive recontextualising that recovers meaning from the toxic narratives buried within hostile discourses. "Seizing the occasion and telling the story", say Smith and Watson, "turns speakers into subjects of narrative who can exercise some control over the meaning of their lives" and this assertion, they say, is "particularly compelling for those whose personal histories include stories that have been culturally unspeakable" (pp. 13-14). Writing autobiographically is a means whereby Fromm's filter may be effectively finessed. 'Lost' experience can be recovered and allowed to

enter into awareness through autobiographical acts of creative re-narrativisation.

'Spirituality' vs 'Religion'

If by now we are familiar with the inscription of, say, the 'coming out' story as one form of this resistant practice, I am making a case for narratives of *spiritual* inquiry as I have defined it to be 'authorised', if you will, by the same rationale, and I argue that queer theory itself might choke on its own orthodoxies if it becomes too rigid to allow for a re-appraisal of spirituality as a knowledge resource in the assertive reconfigurations of identities.

Many conscientious gay men and lesbians will continue to find that religion is irremediably tainted by homophobia and sexism, and find my own work problematic in this regard. This is one of the reasons why I pursue the distinction between 'spirituality' and 'religion'. Halperin (2007) speaks of the need for getting beyond psychology to define subjectivity. The same could apply here, with religion. Hence my use of an Eastern model, deploying a usage of the term 'spirituality' as concerned particularly with a searching enquiry into the nature of being. The distinction is somewhat artificial – with some obvious overlapping – but has been widely adopted, from 'high' to 'low' culture and, increasingly, is characterised by a distinct shift away from some of the traditional religious constructions, to the point where the terms 'spirituality' and 'religion' are increasingly used to signify different kinds of practice.

Anna King (1996), for example, is a theologian who suggests that the term 'spirituality' is often used nowadays to *avoid* the use of the term 'religion', which is increasingly associated with more traditional (and oppressive) ideas. King echoes Carrette's comparison with Artaud's 'non-religious use' of the term 'spirituality' to signify:

an escape from the unnecessary confines of religion into the more inclusive realm of our common humanity, rendering any necessary reference to the transcendent obsolete. (cited in King, 1996, p. 343)

The distinction is increasingly common at the level of popular culture, too. Hip-hop artist, rap musician Wanda Dee (2004), of KLF, describes it this way:

¹⁰ By 'government' Foucault was referring not so much to the mechanics of the modern state as the way in which individuals or groups might be directed to act, so to 'govern', in this sense, is to delimit the field of action. Foucault examined technologies of power as varied as prisons, religious traditions, medical and psychological discourses, education, and so on. For all the different forms they might take, 'Technologies of power' share this common strategy.

Spirituality is the uninterrupted knowledge of God within self. Religion is man-made. I pride myself on being spiritual and not at all religious. (p. 13)

Historically, in the West, 'spirituality' has not been distinguished from 'religion', but under the impact of secularisation (that much debated term) more and more people who have found themselves in cognitive dissonance with the metanarratives supplied by religious doctrines, and increasingly dissatisfied with the politics of the institutions with which such doctrines have been associated, have begun to insist on a similar distinction. When Peter Berger let the secularisation cat out of the bag in the early 1960s, he claimed that religion itself was becoming marginalised. He was later to regret the way the secularisation thesis was being deployed¹¹, but in 1969, in his seminal text, *A Rumour of Angels*, he identified it happening not so much to social institutions – given the increasing separation between church and state – but as applying "to processes inside the human mind", producing "a secularisation of consciousness" (p. 16).

At that time Berger felt that the expansion of the state meant that religion was losing its primary role as the 'legitimator' of social life, and this was producing a trend towards pluralisation of beliefs and practices. Berger claims this was predicted as early as 1915 by Max Weber, who foresaw that capitalism would produce a rational (and scientific) worldview leading to secularisation and the 'disenchantment'¹² of the world. So, when 'church' religion was undergoing a noticeable membership decline, Berger's colleague Thomas Luckmann (1967) wrote that religion itself had moved to the margins of society, because "the internalisation of the symbolic reality of traditional religion is neither enforced nor, in the typical case, favoured by the social structure of contemporary society" (p. 37).

This dis-location of religious discourse from the centre of social value systems is producing outcomes too complex to be analysed in this paper, but it is still difficult today to extricate moral and ethical norms prevailing in the wider,

¹¹ Berger's important work on the sociology of knowledge (and of religion) has produced a rich field of scholarly discussion that I will not be able to delve into here. See Woodhead, Heelas and Martin (2001) for a discussion of his legacy.

¹² It is interesting to note the different use of this term, 'disenchantment' in a Buddhist context, where it is part of a necessary stripping away of delusions.

secular society from antique religious teachings on sexuality. A case could be made, though, that this secularisation process has had the perhaps unexpected effect of liberating conscientious men who are in search of spiritual re-connections from being confined to one exclusivist, totalising pathway for discovery, and has contributed to the 'border crossing' phenomenon that I alluded to at the beginning of this paper. Marginalised by heteronormativity, and perhaps less obliged to uphold the ruling metanarratives, we are free to explore and seek out tools that assist our inquiries wherever we find them.

I suggest that empirical practices common in Asian spiritual technologies can contribute to the liberation of queer intelligence in the West, and that it should become possible to discard all of the 'God' talk, without throwing away the baby with the bathwater.

So, to return to the situation of the sissy boy left grieving his loss – not of the dress, but of the state of unified awareness. Rejected by the religion he found around him, a stranger in his own family, pathologised by psychological medicine, with his disillusionment compounded by the discredited political indoctrinations of a military-industrial complex waging war in Vietnam, he becomes one of the 'seeker' generation of the 1960s¹³, looking beyond his own culture for 'home'.

Like many of his generation, he took a guru, who taught him a life-saving technique of meditative introspection that re-connected his alienated subjectivity within a field of being-consciousness (Sanskrit 'sat-chit-anand') – the very shift that I described earlier.

Two-Way Traffic

In preparing this paper I have had to ask myself if I have been participating in a kind of neo-colonial exploitation. Am I indulging in a typically flagrant Western eclecticism, plundering other cultures' knowledge resources, taking up certain parts of various traditions while leaving others aside, as Hamilton (1995) might charge? I would make the case that the traffic moves in both directions. For example, the political events that led to the flight of the 14th Dalai Lama out of

¹³ See Roof (1993) for a discussion of the "spiritual journeys of the baby boomer generation". There is a rich and diverse literature that usefully problematises such a major cross-cultural phenomenon.

Tibet have been accompanied by the export of that form of Buddhism by a host of Lamas trained in its various traditions who have established dozens of centres for the dissemination of the teachings in various countries. Even before this movement had started, D.T. Suzuki and others had begun presenting aspects of Buddhism – in its manifestation as Zen – to a receptive audience in the United States, Britain, and Europe, with key intellectuals such as Alan Watts, Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, Erich Fromm, and others, beginning a cross-cultural conversation that continues today.

Buddhism, of course, is the prime example of a hybridised cultural praxis – travelling across borders into new areas and being modified, in turn, by local influence. Witness its long historical movement out of northern India, into the south, through S.E. Asia, and into China, and then on to Japan, centuries before the Dalai Lama was forced into exile.¹⁴ The meditation practice in which I have been trained was brought out of India by a young Indian guru in the early 1970s, and he has continued to work, for the past three and a half decades, to make the introspective technology of meditation and other practices available globally.¹⁵ In the process, he has increasingly ‘secularised’ the presentation of his technique and avoids indoctrinating practitioners into a kind of hybridised cultural Hinduism. Nor is he interested in providing totalising answers, but rather provides tools for individuals to use to explore the conundrum of their own existential beingness, wherever they might find themselves located – geographically, culturally, and ideologically.

In Conclusion

I will finish by recalling a discussion between Michel Foucault and a Buddhist teacher, during Foucault’s stay in a Japanese Zen temple, in 1978. Responding to the rōshi’s questioning of the real depth of his interest in Japan, Foucault said that he was more interested in “the Western history of rationality and its limits”. “In reality”, he said, “that rationality constructs colonies everywhere else” (Carrette, 1999, p.

111).¹⁶ They discussed the ‘crisis of Western thought’ and the priest asked Foucault if he felt that Eastern thought could ‘allow’ Western thought to “find a new way” (p. 113). Foucault identified the crisis as “identical to the end of imperialism” and agreed that to confront Western thought with Eastern thought could be one avenue for re-examination (the others being “psychoanalysis, anthropology and the analysis of history” [p. 113]). He also proposed that a “philosophy of the future” must be born “outside of Europe”, or “in consequence of meetings and impacts between Europe and ‘non-Europe’” [p. 113]).

It may be that, due to the alienation and dislocations they experience, queer folk are particularly well suited to meeting in cross-cultural spaces. As Leila Ahmed (2000) says:

The truth is, I think that we are always plural. Not either this or that but this and that. And we always embody in our multiple shifting consciousnesses a convergence of traditions, cultures, histories coming together in this time and this place and moving like rivers through us... I know now that it is of the nature of being in this place... that there will always be new ways to understand what we are living through, and that I will never come to a point of rest or of finality in my understanding. (pp. 25-6)

Acknowledgments

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Author Note

Originally a graduate of the University of Western Australia in the mid-1960s, Victor Marsh was recently awarded his PhD at the University of Queensland. In between, a varied career path took him through theatre, television, and a decade as a modern-day monk, when he

¹⁴ Reflected in the linguistic shifts: Sanskrit *dhyān*; Chinese *Chā’an*; Japanese *Zen*.

¹⁵ My teacher’s personal name is Prem Rawat; sometimes he is addressed by the honorary title of respect familiar in India: ‘Maharaj ji’.

¹⁶ Foucault’s hint that rationalism is another form of colonialism is provocative, and is pertinent to any discussion of how other cultures and practices use the mind and how subjectivities are differently configured, culturally. Coming from an anthropological standpoint, S.J. Tambiah unpacks the implications of rationality as a mode of reasoning, and as a process of constructing knowledge. The issue has special importance when dealing with translation between cultures and the means by which scholars from one culture translate phenomena into categories and concepts of their own culture. (See Tambiah, 1990, pp. 111 ff.)

taught meditation on behalf of his guru in a dozen countries in Asia, North America, and the South Pacific.

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RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OR EQUAL RIGHTS? A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SAME-SEX MARRIAGE DEBATE

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Abstract

This study provides a qualitative analysis of competing narratives in current US debates over same-sex marriage utilising Fisher's (1984) Narrative Paradigm as an analytic framework. A wide variety of religious, political, and opinion-based Internet websites were evaluated to better understand the issues related to this nationally publicised debate. Once the two main narratives were identified, each narrative's rationality, as described by Fisher (1984), was carefully scrutinised and assessed. The analysis revealed that the pro-same-sex marriage argument had more narrative rationality than the anti-same-sex marriage argument, making it more logically consistent and persuasive. Implications for this research are discussed.

Introduction

The following two quotes: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; this is an abomination" (Leviticus, 18:22), and "[w]e hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal" (Declaration of Independence, 1776), are frequently deployed as lynchpins for the two major viewpoints on same-sex marriage in the United States – the right-wing religious viewpoint¹ versus that espoused by proponents of equal marriage rights. This passionately debated issue has divided American society politically and religiously. Nominally Christian individuals who support same-sex marriage are often depicted as traitors to their religion, whereas individuals who do not support same-sex marriage are said to be imposing their potentially prejudiced religious beliefs upon others. These strong opinions have heated up the debate in past years to its boiling point.

¹ The term 'right-wing religious' is used here to signify that those who oppose same-sex marriage from a religious perspective are often aligned with right-wing politics. Many people of varying religions who do not identify with such politics do indeed support same-sex marriage, and there are several Churches in the US that explicitly condone same-sex relations and by extension marriages (e.g., the Metropolitan Community Church of New York).

In many online spaces, individuals have confidently expressed their opposing opinions, often using strong, and sometimes guilt-ridden, messages to make their point. From the noxious, "gays will burn in hell" (God Hates Fags, 2007, p. 1), to the rally cry "only when we have the freedom to choose marriage will we be equal in the eyes of the law and society" (Freedom to Marry Coalition of Massachusetts, 2007, p. 1), pro- and anti- same-sex marriage messages are everywhere. Using Fisher's narrative paradigm, this article investigates the effectiveness of the competing narratives in the current gay marriage debates.² Specifically, this article; (a) presents a brief history of the same-sex marriage debates in the United States; (b) summarises the narrative paradigm as a tool for analysing messages and describes the specific procedures used in this investigation; (c) analyses each narrative in terms of their narrative probability and fidelity; and (d) draws conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses of each narrative.

It is important to evaluate competing narratives, especially in issues that are so hotly debated, in order to gain insight into the persuasive appeals that are most convincing. Thus the following research question guided this study; which of the two opposing narratives in the same-sex marriage debate has more narrative rationality? In order to answer this question, a brief history of the same-sex marriage debates in the United States must first be provided.

Same-Sex Marriage Debates in Historical Context

Although the fight for gay *rights* has been occurring for centuries, the legal debate over gay *marriage* in the United States is relatively new. In 1993, Hawaii's Supreme Court ruling began the nationwide controversy over same-

² It is important to acknowledge that this particular debate over same-sex marriage is but one of many, others occurring on this topic. For example, *within* same-sex communities there are debates over whether or not marriage is indeed a right desired by, or beneficial to, same-sex attracted people.

sex marriage.³ Hawaii ruled that excluding same-sex couples from marriage could infringe on Hawaii's sexual discrimination legislation. Three years later in 1996, a Hawaii trial court ruled that same-sex attracted people should be allowed to marry, but when the decision was sent back to the Hawaii Supreme Court the ruling was overturned, limiting marriage to an act between a man and a woman. During that same year, President Clinton signed the *Defense of Marriage Act* (DOMA), which nationally prohibited the recognition of same-sex marriages (Miles, 2004).

Although the DOMA was signed in 1996, by the turn of the century individual states began to take legislation into their own hands. For instance, in 2000 Vermont became the first state to legally acknowledge same-sex couples with their civil union bill, which entitled same-sex couples to all of the same benefits as heterosexual couples. On September 19, 2003, California Governor Gray Davis signed *The Domestic Partner Rights and Responsibilities Act*. Similar to Vermont's civil union bill, this legislation granted same-sex couples almost all of the same rights and responsibilities as spouses in a civil marriage. Then, near the close of 2003, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court decided that their state constitution should also authorise marriage equality for same-sex couples ("Gay Rights and Gay Marriage: Chronology of Events," 2004). After these rulings, many special interest groups such as the *Family Research Council* quickly called for a federal amendment to the constitution to ban same-sex marriage.

The 2004 presidential election year generated many new court cases, constitutional amendments, and news stories about same-sex marriage debates. For example, throughout the 2004 election year, marriage licenses were issued to homosexual couples in San Francisco, California; Multnomah County, Oregon; New Paltz, New York; and Sandoval County, New Mexico. While homosexual couples were being married across the country, President George W. Bush was signing a U.S. constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages that was sent to Congress in February. In March of 2004, Massachusetts ruled twice on same-sex marriage, deciding to allow same-sex civil

unions, but ban same-sex marriage. After many subsequent court cases, however, Massachusetts began legally marrying same-sex couples all across the state in May of 2004. Same-sex legislature continued that year with Louisiana voters deciding to ban same-sex marriages and civil unions, a Seattle judge approving same-sex marriages, and California's Supreme Court voiding all of the same-sex marriages that had taken place since the beginning of the year.

The gay marriage debates continued to escalate in 2005 and 2006, beginning with the Oregon Supreme Court destroying over 2,500 same-sex marriage licenses issued by Multnomah County in April 2005. Also in April, civil unions became legal in Connecticut, making them the first state to legalise civil unions without orders from a court ("The American Gay Rights Movement: A Timeline," 2006). Many other states tried to pass their own bills legalising same-sex civil unions but failed due to their state's Governor vetoing the legislation, including California in September 2005, Maryland in January 2006, and New Jersey in December 2006. While these states were attempting to allow same-sex civil unions, many other states in 2005 and 2006 were passing constitutional amendments which defined marriage as a union between a woman and a man, including Virginia, South Carolina, Alabama, Colorado, Idaho, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Tennessee. Although some individual states, cities, and counties were fighting for same-sex marriage laws, the country remained split in its opinion on gay marriage. A 2005 ABC News/Washington Post opinion poll stated that 40% of Americans were against the legalisation of same-sex marriage while 56% supported civil unions and/or marriage for same-sex attracted people (4% had no opinion). This depicts just how divided the country has become in recent years regarding this topic.

In addition to all of the court cases, individuals across the country have joined together to create their own organisations to fight for their cause. As explained on their website, the *Freedom to Marry Foundation* (2007) is "a public education organisation dedicated to stronger, more secure gay and lesbian families". Organisations have formed all over the country to fight in favour of equal marriage rights for same-sex couples, including the *National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce* and the *Marriage Equality USA Organisation*. On the other hand, groups such as the *Defense of Marriage Coalition*, the *Family Research Council*, and *Defend the Family*

³ Much of the following information on US gay marriage debates is summarised from the *Timeline of Significant Events in the Gay Marriage Issue* website, and the *Timeline: Same-Sex Marriage* website.

International, which are also very prominent in the United States, are devoted to defining marriage as a union that can only be between a man and a woman. As this particular version of the debate has become more central in the media, two clear, and competing, sides have emerged; pro- and anti-same-sex marriage. Before these two arguments are presented and analysed, an explanation of the method of analysis, Fisher's (1984) Narrative Paradigm, is presented.

The Narrative Paradigm as Analysis

In 1984, Fisher proposed a narrative paradigm to examine human communication. Fisher explains how the term *narration* refers "to a theory of symbolic actions – words and/or deeds – that have a sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them" (p. 2). The narrative paradigm offers one approach to evaluate and interpret human communication, presuming that *all* types of communication are essentially stories (Fisher, 1984; 1985; 1989). Since we are fundamentally storytelling creatures, we are continually telling stories and likewise, evaluating the stories of others. Thus this approach to studying communication examines how individuals interpret stories and create meaning from them. For example, when a mother gives her daughter reasons why she cannot date until she is 16, the mother's argument is considered a story. Then, according to Fisher, the daughter will evaluate that story for its narrative rationality. Individuals assess the narrative rationality of the stories they encounter in order to determine if a story is believable, effective, and persuasive.

The narrative rationality of a story is determined through evaluating its narrative probability and narrative fidelity (Fisher, 1984). Narrative probability considers the structure or coherence of a certain story. It establishes whether the story contains a beginning, middle, and end; if it possesses all of the appropriate characters; and if it includes a convincing combination of facts (Fisher, 1984). Along with narrative probability, a story's narrative fidelity must also be assessed. Narrative fidelity determines whether a story 'rings true' for its audience. It evaluates the effectiveness of a story's persuasive appeal. In other words, it measures whether a story matches with the real-life experiences of the audience. Fisher (p. 2) explains that the narrative paradigm has a function in the fictive world (i.e., "stories of imagination") and in the

real world (i.e., "stories of living"). Thus, whether one is assessing the narrative rationality of the movie *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (a story of imagination) or of the aforementioned mother's reasons for why her daughter cannot date until she is 16 (a story of living), individuals are constantly implementing the narrative paradigm in their everyday lives to evaluate the communication, or stories, they encounter. In this case, arguments made in the context of the same-sex marriage debate outlined above are considered to be stories that need to be evaluated.

Method

The present case study analysed messages from a variety of Internet websites that included either pro- or anti-same-sex marriage messages (see Table 1 in appendix). The Internet was chosen as the method of data collection for two reasons. First, it was important to investigate the everyday views of people in society, since such views make significant contributions to the creation of the available narratives that circulate about particular issues (such as marriage). This was accomplished through searching Internet message boards, Internet blogs, websites created by popular pro- and anti-same-sex marriage organisations, and various online authored articles. Second, the rapid discussion of this debate can be seen in all media, but the Internet offers a venue unlike other media sources. Not only does the Internet have more material than other media outlets, but it also contains information that is more up-to-date than books, journals, magazines, and newspapers. Once an article is written, it can be published online immediately. With other media sources, however, there is generally a waiting period between the creation and publication stages. Thus, information is somewhat dated by the time it is published.

Collection of Data

The Internet search engine www.google.com was used to source websites dedicated to one or both sides of the same-sex marriage debate. The phrases, "anti-gay marriage argument," "pro-gay marriage argument," "anti- same-sex marriage argument," and "pro-same-sex marriage argument" were entered into the search engine and the first 3 pages of Internet 'hits' were then reviewed. In addition, a search for pro- and anti-same-sex marriage organisations was conducted. In order to be

used in the study, each website had to meet a set of criteria including that it had to; (a) be updated since January 1, 2000 (when the debate began to escalate); (b) mention the issue of same-sex/ gay marriage on the first page, (c) include an *opinion* about same-sex/gay marriage (i.e., there were many websites that simply defined gay marriage or presented gay marriage legislature), and (d) include a *primary* opinion about gay marriage, not an evaluation of another person's opinion about gay marriage (if a website reported another's opinion it was still included in the data collection, but evaluations of others' opinions were not analysed). Additionally, any websites that were repeats from other searches were only evaluated once. Out of the 120 websites that were evaluated (30 from each search engine entry), only 37 met all of the four criteria discussed above; 26 of which were considered pro-same-sex marriage oriented, 7 of which were considered anti-same-sex marriage oriented, and 4 of which were considered neutral. Websites were categorised based on the overall message of the site. Sometimes this categorisation was determined based on the actual name of the web address. For example, www.godhatesfags.com contains a very clear anti-gay message, whereas www.equalmarriage.org is explicitly marked as a pro-same-sex marriage site. In other instances, a thorough examination of the website material was necessary to determine its categorisation. It is important to note that while the majority of websites were geared towards a pro-same-sex marriage agenda, most of those websites were organised by first stating an anti-same-sex marriage argument and then presenting a rebuttal for that claim. Thus, although there were more pro-same-sex marriage websites, there was no shortage of anti-same-sex marriage arguments. In fact, there were actually more anti-same-sex arguments than pro-same-sex arguments. In addition to evaluating the websites from the www.google.com searches, 12 organisations and associations, whose mission statements or set of core issues included gay or same-sex marriage, were also included in the analysis. Of the twelve organisation websites that were examined, 6 were considered to be pro-same-sex marriage and 6 were considered to be anti-same-sex marriage. The pro-gay marriage organisations included the *Freedom to Marry Coalition of Massachusetts*, the *Human Rights Campaign*, *Marriage Equality USA*, the *National Black Justice Coalition*, the *National Center for Lesbian Rights*, and the *National Gay & Lesbian Task Force*. The anti-gay marriage organisations included, *Defend the Family*

International, the *American Family Association*, *Americans for Truth*, the *Westboro Baptist Church*, the *Family Research Council*, *Repent America*, and *NoGayMarriage.com*. This brought the total number of websites used in this analysis to 49.

Themes Identified

Once the websites were collected, they were analysed for common themes. Eight main themes emerged from the examination of the same-sex marriage websites (four themes for each side of the debate). The themes were the most common arguments given for each side of the issue and were explicitly stated in the Internet articles, message boards, organisation websites, and blog entries.

There are a number of reasons identified as to why individuals feel that same-sex marriage should *not* be legalised, many of which carry a (predominantly right-wing) religious undertone. One of the most common arguments found in this analysis is referred to as the 'slippery slope' argument. This reasoning states that if gay marriage is legalised, it will open the doors for people to engage in polygamy, marry children, or even marry animals, further undermining the institution of marriage⁴ (e.g., Bidstrup, 2004; Byron, 2006; Eskridge & Spedale, 2006; Head, n.d.; Johnson, 2006; Jokingclown, 2005; Kid Bastard, 2005; Moore, 2001; Outfront Minnesota, 2007; Profo Junkie, 2006).

A second theme that emerged is the idea that children need to grow up with female *and* male role models, not two mothers or two fathers (e.g., Ampersand, 2004; Amseigel, 2006; Bidstrup, 2004; Johnson, 2006; Kolaniski, 2004; Lam, 2003; Moore, 2001; Sears & Hirsh, 2006; Townsley, 2005).

⁴ Although fears of polyamory being recognised as a valid relationship form were not identified in this analysis, this may have been due to a general lack of awareness in the U.S. regarding this practice. However, since individuals who engage in polyamorous relationships are generally discriminated against (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2006), this practice would likely be included in the list of fears if individuals were more aware of it as a relationship practice. Nonetheless, the constant citation of 'polygamy' as lying at the end of a 'slippery slope' highlights the priority given to upholding (marriage) relationships not only between men and women, but between *one* man and *one* woman.

The third theme suggested that marriage has traditionally been between a man and a woman for centuries, and that as God and the Bible both state that marriage should be between a man and a woman, legalising gay marriage would ruin that 'sacred, religious tradition' (e.g., Ampersand, 2004; Bidstrup, 2004; Eskridge & Spedale, 2006; Jokingclown, 2005; Lam, 2003).

The last argument, which was common across many of the websites in this analysis, states the religious belief that marriage is intended for procreation. This argument suggests that because same-sex attracted people cannot procreate through intercourse, they should not be allowed to marry (e.g., Bidstrup, 2004; Cog, 2005; Harry, 2007; Johnson, 2006; Lam, 2003; Profo Junkie, 2006). While there were an abundant number of anti-same-sex marriage arguments, these four stated above are the most common themes that consistently emerged in this analysis.

Just as there are many arguments made as to why gay marriage *should not* be legalised, there were also numerous explanations given about why gay marriage *should* be legalised. The most prominent theme was that prohibiting same-sex marriage violates equal rights laws and discriminates against people based on their sexual orientation (e.g., Gannon, 2004; Moore, 2001; Roste, 2003; Schmalzbach, 2004).

Another popular theme argued that there should be a separation of church and state; "marriage should be legal status for everyone and religious status for some" (Snyder, 2006, p. 1). This theme suggests that even if same-sex attracted people are not able to marry in places of worship, they should still be able to be married legally (e.g., Gannon, 2004; Roste, 2003; Rushka, 2007; Schmalzbach, 2004).

The third argument explains that same-sex couples should be allowed access to the same marriage benefits as heterosexual couples (i.e., the right to file joint taxes, legal rights of spouse to help make health decisions about a partner, etc.) (e.g., CitizenJoe, n.d.; Messerli, 2006; Schmalzbach, 2004; Sears & Hirsh, 2006).

The final theme argues that same-sex marriage does not hinder any rights that heterosexual couples currently hold (e.g., Head, n.d.; Messerli, 2006; Outfront Minnesota, 2007).

Analysis

Narrative Probability

As explained, narrative probability is concerned with the believability of a story and the story's structural coherence (Fisher, 1984). For example, narrative probability evaluates whether the story has all of its parts, whether it 'hangs together', and whether all of the claims within the story add up. Regarding the same-sex marriage debate, there are two clear competing narratives, pro- and anti-same-sex marriage, with many key themes that support each side.

Narrative one: Anti-same-sex marriage

When assessing the narrative probability of the anti-same-sex marriage narrative, a few questions must be asked. First, does the story 'hang together' (Fisher, 1984)? The anti-gay marriage argument hangs together in some ways, but does not in others. For instance, the narrative does hang together in that there is a general overarching theme – religious values – that connects a few of the main arguments together. The arguments explaining that marriage is between a man and a woman according to the Bible and that marriage is intended for procreation are two religion-laden messages. Anti-same-sex marriage advocates believe that if gay marriage is legalised, the 'sacred institution' of marriage will be destroyed. Religion is a very strong and persuasive tool that definitely strengthens the structural coherence of this narrative.

On the other hand, the narrative does not hang together because of the irrational causations inferred, namely that if same-sex marriage is legalised, people will want to engage in polygamy, incest, or bestiality. As Corvino (2005) explains, "PIB (i.e., polygamy, incest, & bestiality) and homosexuality are no more essentially connected than PIB and heterosexuality" (p. 502). The phenomena under question here (i.e., homosexuality, polygamy, incest, & bestiality) are irrelevant and are not even minimally connected to each other (Corvino, 2000; 2005). This consequentialist argument has been fallaciously inserted into the discussion of same-sex marriage to divert attention away from more logical arguments. This red herring fallacy diminishes the structural coherence of the anti-same-sex marriage narrative.

A second question asks; does the story have all of its parts (Fisher, 1984)? In other words, does the narrative have a beginning, middle, and end? In this narrative, the beginning of the story describes the history of marriage as a heterosexual sacred tradition that has been around for centuries. Also, since the Bible dates back for centuries, its stance that homosexuality is wrong reinforces the narrative's strength in the beginning. The middle of the narrative concerns whether gay marriage will be legalised or not (i.e. what is currently occurring). And the narrative ends with the negative consequences of legalising gay marriage. If gay marriage is to be legally recognised, according to this narrative, the outcomes will be horrendous. The sacred tradition and institution of marriage will be ruined forever, individuals will want to marry animals and children, people will engage in polygamy, and children will be raised in inadequate and immoral family environments. Thus the anti-same-sex narrative, whilst offensive to many, nonetheless contains all of the necessary narrative parts.

The third and final question to ask when assessing the probability of a narrative is whether all of the facts 'add up' (Fisher, 1984). In the case of the anti-same-sex narrative, the illogical connections made, and slippery slope arguments used, seriously damage its overall probability. The arguments about the inevitability of polygamy, incest, and bestiality (PIB); procreation being a requirement of marriage; and children needing a mother and father to function properly do not add up.

As explained, the PIB argument makes connections between irrelevant phenomena, forcing individuals to choose between either (a) heterosexual marriage which is currently acceptable in society or (b) homosexual marriage which would encourage polygamy, incest, and bestiality (e.g., Corvino, 2000; 2005). This reasoning is misleading and deceptive at best.

Likewise, supporters of the procreation argument fail to address heterosexual couples who are unable to have children, post-menopausal heterosexual couples, and heterosexual couples who choose to not produce offspring, which has increasingly become a popular choice among married couples (see Coontz, 2005). Should these couples not be allowed to marry because they do not/are not able to procreate? This line of reasoning thus decreases the argument's integrity. Pollitt (2003)

attacks the procreation argument when she states, "there is something creepily authoritarian and insulting about reducing marriage to procreation, as if intimacy mattered less than biological fitness" (p. 9).

Lastly, the 'two opposite-sex parents' argument posits that children need role models of both sexes to develop the skills they need to succeed in life. Such arguments have been dismissed in two distinct ways: 1) by social scientists who have challenged the logic of 'opposite sex parents' on legal (Kelly, 2005) and political (Clarke, 2006) grounds, and 2) by researchers who have highlighted the unique positive benefits of growing up in a lesbian or gay – headed household (see Australian Psychological Society, 2007, for a summary of this). The 'two opposite-sex parents' argument fails to recognise such empirical studies and their challenges to the logic of heterosexual parenting being applied to same-sex couples and their families.

Overall, considering the three components of narrative probability, the anti-gay marriage argument has only average probability.

Narrative two: Pro-same-sex marriage

Similar to the anti-same-sex marriage narrative, there is a definite overarching theme that ties the arguments in the pro-same-sex marriage narrative together; the equal rights of American citizens. All four of the pro-gay marriage arguments that emerged in this analysis dealt with individual rights. For example, the argument that homosexual couples should be able to receive the same legal, financial, and health benefits as heterosexual couples, and the argument that prohibiting gay marriage violates equal rights laws both rely on the belief that all people should have equal rights. The claim that "getting married under God is for the churches to decide not the local government... [thus] stopping people from filing that paperwork based on their sexual orientation is bigotry, plain and simple" (Ruska, 2007) is another argument that centres on the need for equality. Gaymarriage.life.tips.com (2007b) further adds to the idea that the pro-same-sex marriage narrative has a clear individual rights overarching theme when it explains that "preventing gay couples from marrying is seen as a way of separating gay people from mainstream society".

While this narrative has a clear beginning, middle, and end like the anti-same-sex marriage narrative, the content of each part is greatly different. For instance, the beginning of the pro-same-sex marriage story is also based on the past, but instead of the history of marriage or religion, the main theme here is based on past laws and the history of inequality. The pro-same-sex marriage narrative explicates the historical value in the separation of church and state, which was established by the U.S. Constitution almost 218 years ago. Additionally, Kolaniski (2004) explains that the prohibition of homosexual marriage can be compared to the unjustifiable prohibition on interracial marriage, which until 1967 was illegal.⁵ The beginning of this narrative shines a negative light on the actual inequalities of the past and emphasises the importance of equality legislation that has been established for centuries. The middle of the pro-same-sex marriage narrative, like the anti-same-sex marriage narrative, is the current actions taking place in the country regarding gay marriage. And finally, the end of this narrative is the many positive outcomes that will emerge if same-sex marriage is legalised. For instance, homosexuals will have the right to file joint taxes, to collect survivor benefits, and to receive awards of property in divorce or death, which according to this narrative are great advances towards equality.

Finally, narrative probability asks whether all of the facts add up (Fisher, 1984). Unlike the anti-same-sex narrative, this narrative is logically developed and there are no irrational claims or causations, therefore the facts *do* add up. The overarching theme that equality is superior to inequality is extremely logical. Overall, the pro-same-sex marriage debate possesses high narrative probability.

Narrative Fidelity

As explained earlier, narrative fidelity considers whether a story 'rings true' (Fisher, 1984). Fidelity examines the degree to which the story is perceived by its audience as being truthful to their real-life experiences (Fisher, 1984; 1985). Before narrative fidelity is evaluated, it is

significant to note that the narrative fidelity of this story depends on the *audience's* perception of its believability. It is also important to reiterate that the audience for the anti-same-sex marriage narrative is somewhat different to the audience of the pro-same-sex marriage narrative.

Narrative one: Anti-same-sex marriage

One of the main aspects of the anti-same-sex marriage narrative is the referencing of religious beliefs and the Bible. The Bible is a historical, moral-driven, value-laden book that is presented as the message of God. The Bible is extremely persuasive, especially to those who read the scriptures more literally than others. Thus, when asking whether the anti-same-sex marriage story is consistent with other stories, most readers of the Bible will conclude that the narrative is very consistent with numerous Biblical stories, and also many other orally communicated religious stories. This similarity strengthens the fidelity of the anti-same-sex marriage narrative.

Fisher (1984) explains that a narrative must also be an accurate representation of common sense reality. The argument that a homosexual couple cannot procreate is based on commonsense, but as explained earlier, the notion that procreation is a requirement of marriage is not. As Cog (2005) states, "if gays are prosecuted for not bearing children, then heterosexual couples who are childless should also be prosecuted" (p. 1). Additionally, the 'slippery slope' argument is not based on common sense reality either. However, the claim that God and the Bible say that marriage is only between a man and a woman definitely rings true with the narrative's audience's representation of commonsense reality. In all, the anti-same-sex marriage narrative has above average narrative fidelity mostly because of its references to the Bible, a tremendously persuasive book for this audience.

Narrative two: Pro-same-sex marriage

When discussing the narrative fidelity of the pro-same-sex marriage story, it is important to explain the narrative's central audience. Generally, the narrative is focused towards those who believe that equality is a human right. This is not to say that those who do not agree with same-sex marriage also do not believe in equal rights. Instead, the anti-same-sex marriage narrative, which is directed towards a religious audience, is simply more compelling for those

⁵ Importantly, some researchers have questioned comparisons between discrimination based on race and discrimination based on sexuality, as it ignores the race privilege experienced by white same-sex attracted people, and it primarily prioritises the rights agendas of white middle-class people (McBride, 2005; Riggs, 2006).

individuals. With that said, the pro-same-sex marriage narrative relies more on the idea of equality and the law. Therefore, the pro-same-sex marriage narrative is also consistent with other stories, just different kinds of stories. This narrative is similar to stories where inequality is damned and equality emerges as the right thing to do, such as the stories of interracial marriage, women's right to vote, and the civil rights movement. These too are extremely persuasive in nature. These types of narratives focus on moments in history when inequality was blatantly visible and when, looking back today, most individuals can agree that equal rights *were* the right thing to do. When discussing whether the narrative is a true illustration of common sense reality, the pro-same-sex marriage audience would agree that it is. Referring back to the inequality stories of the past, common sense shows that when equal rights were given to women and African Americans, the lives of these groups improved. For example, African Americans and women are now able to vote and are better represented in the corporate workplace and in higher education. Therefore, by extension, according equal rights to homosexual couples would most likely result in progress, not regress. The pro-same-sex marriage narrative then possesses high fidelity because of its consistency with the extremely persuasive equal rights stories of the past.

Conclusion: Probability Plus Fidelity Equals Rationality

As stated earlier, the narrative paradigm offers an approach to evaluating and interpreting human communication, presuming that all types of communication are essentially stories (Fisher, 1984; 1989). While each narrative is very persuasive to different audiences (i.e., fidelity), the pro-same-sex marriage narrative has much more narrative probability, making its overall narrative rationality superior to that of the anti-same-sex marriage narrative. Overall, the anti-same-sex marriage narrative is most effective with a more conservative, literal Bible-reading audience, while the pro-same-sex marriage narrative is most successful with individuals who believe in the importance of equality for everyone. Even though each narrative seems to be extremely persuasive within its own audience, when evaluating the narratives for their overall narrative rationality, the pro-same-sex marriage narrative surpasses the competing story due to its high probability *and* high fidelity.

Analysing competing narratives are extremely important so that we can identify and learn from the most persuasive appeals. There are many practical implications of this research. For instance, learning how to effectively evaluate argumentation is a skill that can be incredibly useful in everyday life. Whether one is deciding who to vote for in a presidential election or listening to a salesperson explain the benefits of their particular product, knowing how to evaluate the messages of others is a great ability to possess. Second, being able to develop strong, persuasive arguments is another practical application of this research. Knowing what elements go in to creating an effective message can significantly improve any argument. Fisher's narrative paradigm demonstrates one means through which to construct a persuasive argument by explaining the necessity for high probability and fidelity. Lastly, this research points to the importance of evaluating the audience when developing a persuasive message. Both the pro- and anti-same-sex narratives appeal to their audiences in ways that compel their supporters to not only agree with the respective narrative, but also fight for each cause.

In conclusion, Fisher (1984) explains that individuals evaluate the stories of others to determine if the story is believable, effective and persuasive. The pro-same-sex marriage narrative is more believable, effective, and persuasive than the anti-same-sex-marriage narrative because of the logical correlations made, successful audience analysis, and realistic connections to previous narratives.

Although this study focused on two competing narratives (i.e., pro- vs anti-same-sex marriage), it is important to note that there are numerous organisations that are currently combining religious beliefs and equal rights to create their own same-sex marriage narratives. For example, the Metropolitan Community Church promotes the Bible's message of love and compassion for all when discussing same-sex marriage. Future research should focus on examining the development of narratives that bring together these two values. Identifying and analysing the persuasive tools used by these organisations would add to this world-wide conversation about same-sex marriage.

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Author Note

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GILL: RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OR EQUAL RIGHTS

Table 1. Documents Used in Analysis

Pro- or anti-gay	Author	URL	Date Accessed
Pro	Moore, L.	http://www.angelfire.com/home/leah/index.html	25/01/2007
Pro	Kid Bastard	http://www.moxiegrrrl.com/2005/03/specious-arguments.html	25/01/2007
Pro	Eskridge & Spedale	http://blog.oup.com/oupblog/2006/06/questions_and_a.html	25/01/2007
Pro	Ampersand	http://www.amptoons.com/blog/archives/2004/08/30/the-republican-platform-anti-same-sex-marriage-and-anti-civil-union/	25/01/2007
Pro	Lam, C.	http://iwarrior.uwaterloo.ca/?module=displaystory&story_id=1052&format=html&edition_id=15	25/01/2007
Pro	Schraub, D.	http://dsdevil.blogspot.com/2005/02/values-based-debate.html	25/01/2007
Pro	Ampersand	http://www.amptoons.com/blog/archives/2003/11/28/how-not-to-engage-an-opponents-arguments/	20/01/2007
Pro	Cog	http://abstractfactory.blogspot.com/2005/12/respectable-arguments-against-same-sex.html	20/01/2007
Pro	Adragna, A.	http://quasipundit.blogspot.com/2003_09_07_quasipundit_archive.html	25/01/2007
Pro	No Author	http://gaymarriage.lifetips.com/cat/64293/for-gay-marriage/index.html	25/01/2007
Pro	Bidstrup, S.	http://www.bidstrup.com/marriage.htm	25/01/2007
Pro	Profo Junkie	http://iowaunderground.com/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=5938&view=previous&sid=b6f1b06b66028c95adfc8f6f1dd31119	20/01/2007
Pro	Hugman, M.	http://www.lpva.com/Archives/Editorial/Hugman/20060415.shtml	25/01/2007
Pro	Chris	http://mixingmemory.blogspot.com/2004/12/gay-marriage-arguments.html	25/01/2007
Pro	Johnson, N.	http://web.morons.org/feature/marriage.jsp#tehgay	25/01/2007
Pro	Cline, A.	http://atheism.about.com/b/a/238251.htm	25/01/2007
Pro	Head, T.	http://civilliberty.about.com/od/gendersexuality	25/01/2007
Pro	Sears & Hirsh	http://www.law.ucla.edu/williamsinstitute/issues/NoTime.html	26/01/2007
Pro	Wedgewood, R.	The fundamental argument for same sex marriage. <i>Journal of Political Philosophy</i> , 7, 225- 242.	25/01/2007
Pro	Harry	http://crookedtimber.org/2007/01/10/same-sex-marriage-revisited/	20/01/2007
Pro	Ruska, J.	http://www.jimmyr.com/blog/Bush_is_Full_of_Gay_155_2006.php	20/01/2007
Pro	Roste, V.	http://www.samesexmarriage.ca/equality/ten_reasons.htm	25/01/2007
Pro	Outfront Minnesota	http://www.outfront.org/library/responses.html	26/01/2007
Pro	Gannon, H. A.	http://www.uhh.hawaii.edu/academics/hohonu/writing.php	26/01/2007
Pro	Jokingclown	http://www.ubersite.com/m/76768	25/01/2007
Pro	Snyder, N.	http://www.insidevandy.com/drupal/node/1353	25/01/2007
Both	Messerli, J.	http://www.balancedpolitics.org/same_sex_marriages.htm	26/01/2007
Both	CitizenJoe	http://www.citizenjoe.org/node/294	26/01/2007
Both	Ogilvie, M.	http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_5/Ogilvie.htm	26/01/2007
Both	Amsiegel	http://prawfsblawg.blogs.com/prawfsblawg/2006/10/the_antisame_se.html	20/01/2007
Anti	Kolanski, A.	http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1082190/posts	20/01/2007
Anti	Charalambous, M.	http://www.fatherhoodcoalition.org/cpf/newreadings/2003/MC_SJC_gay_marriage.htm	25/01/2007
Anti	Townsley, J.	http://www.jeramyt.org/papers/gay_marriage_arguments.htm	25/01/2007
Anti	Dalls, J.	http://www.leaderu.com/jhs/dallas.html#Social	25/01/2007
Anti	Byron	http://www.byron-harvey.com/2006/12/25/gay-marriage-equals-polygamy-just-like-ive-been-saying/	25/01/2007
Anti	No Author	http://gaymarriage.lifetips.com/cat/64292/against-gay-marriage/index.html	25/01/2007
Anti	Paul	http://regularthoughts.blogspot.com/2005/07/contra-gay-marriage.html	25/01/2007
Pro	<i>Marriage Equality</i>	http://www.marriageequality.org/meusa/about-us.shtml	25/01/2007
Pro	<i>National Black Justice Coalition</i>	http://www.nbjcoalition.org/	25/01/2007
Pro	<i>Freedom to Marry Coalition Massachusetts</i>	http://www.equalmarriage.org/	20/01/2007
Pro	<i>National Center for Lesbian Rights</i>	http://www.nclrights.org/	25/01/2007
Pro	<i>National Gay & Lesbian Task Force</i>	http://www.thetaskforce.org/	25/01/2007
Pro	<i>Human Rights Campaign</i>	http://www.hrc.org/	25/01/2007
Pro	<i>Freedom to Marry Foundation</i>	http://www.ftmf.org/	25/01/2007
Anti	<i>Defend the Family International</i>	http://www.abidingtruth.com/	25/01/2007
Anti	<i>American Family Association</i>	http://www.afa.net/	25/01/2007
Anti	<i>Americans for Truth</i>	http://www.americansfortruth.com/	25/01/2007
Anti	<i>God Hates Fags</i>	http://www.godhatesfags.com/	20/01/2007
Anti	<i>Family Research Council</i>	http://www.frc.org/	25/01/2007
Anti	<i>Repent America</i>	http://www.repentamerica.com/aboutus.html	25/01/2007
Anti	<i>No Gay Marriage</i>	http://www.nogaymarriage.com/	25/01/2007



THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT: GAY MEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF PENIS SIZE

MURRAY J.N. DRUMMOND AND SHAUN M. FILIAULT

Abstract

Contemporary research regarding men's body image has focused primarily on perceptions of muscularity and thinness, leaving aside other issues such as penis size. Despite pop cultural notions regarding the importance of penis size, and Western cultural notions more broadly regarding masculinity and the penis, little research has been done on men's perceptions of penis size, and no work has been done on gay men's perceptions of penis size. This article presents the results of three separate qualitative research projects conducted by the authors with openly gay men that considered body image and masculinity in the lives of gay men. Noteworthy is that all of the studies were conducted using the same methodology and data analysis procedures. This paper utilises rich descriptive text to highlight the issues surrounding gay men, penis size and constructions of masculinities. The primary aim of the paper is to provide a context within which future qualitative research can be conducted on issues relating to the penis among gay men, in addition to emphasising the importance of perceiving the penis as a legitimate body image issue which has rarely been discussed in qualitative research projects.

Introduction

Body image may be understood as one's internal representation of one's own bodily appearance (Thompson, Altabe & Tanleff-Dunn, 1999). Displeasure with one's body image, clinically termed "body image dissatisfaction", has been related to a host of biopsychosocial negatives, including poor self esteem (Olivardia, Pope, Borowiecki & Cohane, 2004), extreme dieting (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999), and the use of dangerous dieting/anabolic supplements (Ridgeway & Tylka, 2005). Accordingly, body image dissatisfaction should be considered a potentially critical threat to an individual's health.

While an individual can display a general dislike with one's overall appearance – termed 'appearance dissatisfaction' – one can also exhibit dissatisfaction with one's perceived

attributes in any one body part or area. For instance, one may be dissatisfied with one's degree of body hair, but be neutral or pleased with one's perceived degree of facial attractiveness. Thus, specific body parts/domains deserve separate consideration when researching body image.

Although women's body image concerns have a long history in the psychological literature (e.g., Brumberg, 2000; Gordon, 2000), men's body image has only emerged as an area of intense academic interest in the past decade (Anderson, Cohn, & Holbrook, 2000; Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000). In particular, men's body image research has focused on two specific body domains: muscularity and thinness. Past research has demonstrated that men often desire bodies considerably more muscular than they perceive their own to be (Olivardia, et al., 2004; Pope et al., 2000), perhaps due to Western culture's association of muscle with masculinity (Bordo, 1999; Connell, 2005; Dotson, 1999; Kimmel & Mahalik, 2004; McCreary, Saucier, & Courtenay, 2005). In addition to muscle, some men may desire a thinner body (Filiault, in press), though this is still an emerging area of research.

While important, research on men's perceptions of muscularity and thinness disregards other body areas that may be of significance to men, such as body hair, height, and clothing style. One area in particular that may be of consequence to men is penis size. A cursory glance at mass media would suggest a male obsession with penis size. Indeed, the presence of Web sites claiming to increase the magnitude of men's genitals is overwhelming, as any basic Web search for 'penis size' suggests. Likewise, jokes and references abound in mainstream media regarding penis size (see Bordo, 1999, for a full discussion). Additionally, web sites such as the "Large Penis Support Group" (for men with large genitals; www.lpsg.org) and "Measurement" (for those men with smaller penises; www.measurement.org) exist as a venue for men to discuss what is a seemingly important issue to many contemporary men.

Stereotypically, men's penis size is linked with Western cultural notions of masculinity. That is, a large penis is indicative of one being 'more' of a man (Bordo, 1999). As Pope and colleagues (2000) state; "genitals symbolize virility, procreative potency, and power" (p. 165), all of which are critical to accessing what is termed "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 2005). Furthermore, other analyses of Western masculinity suggest men are expected to occupy space (Drummond, 1996) or 'penetrate' space (Pronger, 1999; 2002), dictums which both lend credence to the need for a large, penetrating penis. Accordingly, and based on such cultural stereotypes, a small penis draws into question a man's sexual prowess and his overall masculinity. Based on such symbolism and cultural observations, it is little wonder that a large number of men present each year for penile augmentation surgery, despite the risky nature of the procedure and the fact that many of those men are of a normal size (Dotson, 1999; Mondaini, et al., 2002; Pope et al., 2000). Seemingly, then, penis size is a major body image concern for many if not most men living in Western nations.

Despite those observations, the empirical research on men's perception of penis size is limited. While a cornucopia of research exists which attempts to determine average penis sizes for various groups of men (e.g., Bogaert & Hershberger, 1999; Ponchietti, et al., 2001; Spyropoulos, et al., 2002), surprisingly little evidence exists which ascertains how those sizes and averages impact men's sense of self. Of the limited extant literature, it appears as though penis size does hold some importance to heterosexual men's sense of self. In a large-scale (N = 25,594) Internet survey of heterosexual men, only 55% of men reported being satisfied with their penis size and 45% reported wanting a larger penis. These results were consistent across age groups. Notably, men who perceived themselves to have a large penis exhibited higher appearance satisfaction, suggesting a link between body image and penis size (Lever, Frederick & Peplau, 2006).

Penis size may be of increased importance to some gay men due to the erotic nature of the body in many gay cultures and the 'double presence' of the penis in a gay relationship or sexual encounter. However, to our knowledge, only one study has been conducted which considered gay men's perceptions of penis size (Bergling, 2007). According to that data, only 7% of gay men consider the penis to be their

'favourite' body part on another man. Data regarding the importance of size were conflicted, with some men expressing that size was important and others disagreeing. Finally, there are suggestions that men within the gay 'bear' community may prefer small penises (Wright, 1997), though there is no data to back up that assertion. However, given findings that suggest the importance of penis size to straight men, there is little reason to believe that gay men do not share similar beliefs as their straight peers. Furthermore, those beliefs may be exacerbated by the overall importance of the body in dominant gay male culture (Bergling, 2007; Drummond, 2005; Signorile, 1997), especially as a site of erotic symbolism. Indeed, penis size may serve as another level of stratification within a community that is already highly divisive based on somatic characteristics.

Considering the general paucity of information regarding men's – especially gay men's – perceptions of penis size, and the importance of body image in dominant gay culture, the present study engaged in interviews with openly gay men to determine their perceptions of penis size and its relationship to their sense of body image and masculinity.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited for three separate projects considering body image amongst gay men: one regarding young gay men's body image (Drummond, 2005), another involving older men (Drummond, 2006), and one considering body image in gay athletes (Filiault & Drummond, 2007). The latter study was an exploratory pilot study for a larger doctoral dissertation. All of the studies were approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of South Australia.

A total of 24 men aged 18-25 years participated in the first study. They were recruited using convenience and snowball sampling, both of which are useful in recruiting from stigmatised populations such as gay men (Patton, 2002). Initial points for recruitment included online gay networks and project leaders at counseling centres for gay youth. The second project recruited participants through signage at several gay men's health establishments. Three men in the 'babyboomer' generation were interviewed for this rich descriptive analytic study. The third

project also included three men aged 28, 34, and 48 years. Men were recruited from an all-gay sports group in a major Australian city. All men in these studies were 'out' to friends, and most were out to their families.

Procedure

The first study involved two phases. The initial phase was a focus group with 10 men. The focus group served to elucidate themes for the second phase, which consisted of individual interviews with 14 men separate from those in the focus group. The second and third studies consisted of individual interviews with participants.

For the individual interview component in all of the research projects consistency was maintained in terms of data collection methods. This relative uniformity allowed for the research data to be analysed using the same analytic procedures as well as providing methodological uniformity. Ultimately this provides research rigour and improves research reliability.

The men in these three research projects contacted the researchers directly to establish a time and location for the interview. Each participant was provided with an information sheet outlining the purpose of the various studies, and then signed an informed consent form.

Interviews lasted 60 to 120 minutes. They were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. The interview guide was semi-structured in nature. Semi-structured interviews provide the advantage of ensuring coverage of key themes, while also providing the researcher with the opportunity to follow-up on unexpected areas of interest discussed by participants (Patton, 2002). Interviews were guided by the methodological tenets of phenomenology. Phenomenology seeks the "essence of meaning" (Patton, 2002, p. 106) that individuals attach to a lived experience in order to understand "what it is like" (Seidman, 1998, p. 5). Accordingly, the present studies sought to understand the meaning gay men give to their bodies, bodily practices, and masculinity and to understand what it is like to be a gay man in contemporary Western society. Although qualitative paradigms make no claim to generalisability, it is believed that the stories and interpretations provided by these men will be reflective of the experiences of many gay men living in Western cultures.

Analysis

Interviews were transcribed then analysed using inductive methods. Inductive analyses are a 'bottom-up' approach to data interpretation, by which dominant themes and issues are allowed to 'naturally' emerge out of the data, rather than major themes being decided prior to the beginning of data collection. This process of analysis provides the greatest degree of congruence between emergent themes and the data provided by participants (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 1998). This type of analysis requires the researcher to detect patterns and similarities in the data, based upon the researchers' understanding of the data and expert knowledge of relevant literature. Says Seidman (1998), "what is of essential interest is embedded in each research topic and will arise from each transcript. The interviewer must affirm his or her own ability to recognize it" (p. 101).

Findings

This section presents the findings to emerge from each of the three individual research projects. The data around penis size have been thematically analysed together to create a single large research project. This procedure has previously been termed a 'meta-thematic analysis' (Drummond, 2005a). Therefore the data will be discussed as one rather than in terms of individual projects. The themes are constructed according to how the men come to understand contemporary cultural issues surrounding penis size and how they conceptualise these understandings with respect to masculinities. The themes to emerge are based on a majority viewpoint. While there were only several themes to emerge they are very powerful in terms of the ways in which the participants responded. The dominant themes to emerge, and to be discussed in detail are: (i) 'Size Matters' and (ii) The Penis/Masculinity Relationship. As themes both relating to the same 'masculine' body domain, these dominant themes are, to a certain degree, overlapping. However, this overlap and complexity reflects the difficulty and ambiguity the men had in describing the role of the penis in forming a gay masculinity and body sensibility.

'Size Matters'

Contemporary Western culture is one of largess, in which bigger is often seen as better. Such exaltation of bigness impacts men's relationships

to their own bodies. Somatically, big, hard bodies are viewed as preferential, as the copious literature on men's muscularity suggests. Drummond (1996) suggested men are expected culturally to occupy space as a symbol of their masculinity; a big, muscular body was viewed by many as the 'ideal' way to take up that space.

The occupation of space theory for men is a somewhat fluid concept. When it was initially discussed (Drummond, 1996) it was based around the body size, especially muscularity, as a whole. However, this concept can also apply on a micro-level to individual body parts. Influential masculine 'parts' include a large chest, broad shoulders, visible abdominal muscles (often referred to as the 'six pack') and large biceps (Olivardia et al., 2004). Significantly, these are culturally observable features that can be easily viewed, compared, analysed and discussed. However, less culturally observable features, such as the genitals, also influence the positioning of men's perceived masculinity.

With the advent of feminist movement, heterosexual women have increasingly developed the opportunity to express their desires regarding male genitalia. This change has occurred as images of scantily clad men have become more common in the mass media, signaling a major change in the discourse surrounding men's bodies. Therefore men's once 'private parts' are no longer privately ensconced (Bordo, 1999; Dotson, 1999; Kimmel, 2006). Similarly, over the past decade, cultural evolution has led to a rapid increase in gay television programs and other forms of media, particularly print and electronic media where the male body and 'private parts' can be openly discussed, a change from earlier gay media which was more coy in its portrayal of same sex sexuality (Rosenberg, Scagliotti & Schiller, 1984). This change has arguably led to the penis being an open topic of conversation that is no longer taboo. As a consequence, the increased level of scrutiny has placed a degree of pressure on males to live up to certain archetypal ideals that were primarily associated with visible body parts: large, imposing, and space consuming.

In dominant gay culture the penis has become a body part that is seen, compared, contrasted and indeed linked to sexual attractiveness and viability. However, it appears not all gay men have the same opinion regarding penis size. There appears to be an existing tension between those who perceive large penises as a signifier

of desirability and those who perceive otherwise. In the following text one of the older gay men candidly discusses his thoughts around penis size. He clearly identifies his own biases and tensions with size, identifying not wanting to have sex with a man with a small penis, and yet despite mentioning his own size, he does not believe size is a 'defining' issue.

Um, you couldn't do it with somebody who was wearing a cashew in their underpants, and I have thrown myself in an intimate situation for instance in the bushes, and you get into their undies and its this tiny little thing and its so embarrassing that you go through with it because, you know, it's a pity thing. And I have lived in Japan for a little while and having sex with Japanese men was a nightmare because they have, well they call their penises bullets and they just 'jigger, jigger, bang, bang, bang'. They can do that for an hour and its so boring you don't actually... I don't get any satisfaction from being fucked by a small cock, but I've got a huge one and I don't see myself as very masculine. That's not a defining thing.

The participant's comment regarding Japanese men and small penises is significant in terms of racial bias. While it is not within the scope of this paper to significantly contribute to discussions on this topic, it is noteworthy that a number of authors have provided important discussions around the ways in which Asian gay men are perceived within the dominant (white) gay community (Ayres, 1999; Chuang, 1999; Drummond, 2005b; Han, 2006). Han discusses the common perceptions associated with Asian men's penis size, claiming that in terms of desirability there is a racial hierarchy and Asian gay men are positioned below Caucasian, Black and Latino men. Indeed he goes on to suggest that portrayals of Asian gay men in mainstream and pornographic media are often feminised as a consequence of the supposedly smaller penises of Asian men. This is an area of social and cultural significance that requires further exploration and debate.

While not exhibiting such issues of racial tension another older male emphasised his own internal tensions about size by attempting to highlight what others think about penis size and desirability.

Well, yeah, so as much as they say it doesn't matter, it does but for the majority of people, I know if you have a small penis then you're very wary about it and if you have a large penis then nobody asks any questions, so you know, there's a lot of that sort of happening. And you know, I

know guys that have got big cocks and are forever fiddling, but aren't deep people, you know what I mean? So, would you want to be, 'he's fabulous cos he's got a big dick' or because you are a fabulous person? I don't know, but there are size queens out there that's for sure. There are guys that'll, you know, if its under 7 inches then they're not interested. Well you know, there's a lot more to people besides that, so yeah it doesn't play in my mind but I know that it does play in others and there's a big part of that but it has a lot to do with the way a culture is marketed and all that sort of stuff too. You know, young virile lads with hard-ons and you know well everybody's saying well once you get over 45/50/60 well then the age limit affects. So you know, its fabulous when you're 17/18/25/32 but after that its harder to actually just maintain erections, and the change of stamina and doing all those sorts of things plus living life you know and maintaining relationships and all that sort of rubbish.

Interestingly this man, as a consequence of being older, is able to provide commentary on social issues that emerge within Western consumer culture as well as reflect upon his body as it goes through the ageing process. This vantage point is somewhat different to a young male's perspective on the same issues. Younger men do appear to have the capacity to identify particular cultural ideologies surrounding penis size, however the majority stated simply that 'bigger is better'. According to one man:

In a gay world, the bigger the dick usually the more people want to have sex with you.

While another claimed in reference to a sexual partner with a small penis:

I'd just be thinking "What?!" You know, "What on Earth are we going to do with that?!"

Despite this being a common discourse there was at times a little more introspection and reflection on the issue than simple one-line comments. According to all of the men the issue of penis size is something they typically did not discuss in such an analytic context. Therefore, when given the opportunity, the men attempted to embrace the challenge. One of the men claimed:

Yeah it's always like you know, size matters, I don't know. And like people say 'oh how big is your hand?' 'ooh that must mean something, big feet' and they're you know, always referring to that.

Another man suggested:

I think this is an issue that most men have, they want it to be big and the longer the better, the thicker the better and then they get satisfied. It's important to compare with other people if their penis is smaller or shorter or something like that.

The Penis/Masculinity Relationship

Each of the comments in the first theme highlight the significance of penis size to these particular gay men. Whether or not this significance is based on cultural expectations in terms of what should be said about penis size requires further exploration. What also requires further investigation is whether this significance of penis size is associated with both long-term and short-term relationships. Nevertheless the young men involved in the focus group interview provided an important perspective on the significance of penis size and in particular having a large penis, as we can see in the following extract.

Q: Okay, what about the penis? What does that have to do with masculinity?

M1: It's got to be big.

Q: It's got to be big, okay. Is that what you think?

M1: I think it's ...

M5: Well women can be masculine too as well, so I don't know if it's the most defining trait of masculinity.

M4: But I think between guys it's one way that they tell one another that they're more masculine than the other, is the size of their penis.

M3: People used to say, he's a strapping young lad. Not only in reference to his cock size but also to whether he was macho and masculine.

M4: On TV early this morning, when I turned it on there was ad...

M2: When you look at personal ads they say things like 8 inches capped, whatever. And they go on about it at great length and trying to impress the other person. More so than say fit or strong or whatever. They go straight to 8 inches uncapped.

M4: There's a very good ad in England which kind of outlines it for me anyway, and that has two guys standing on the stage. And they were naked and something was in front of their groin, which was interesting. And then people had to vote as to what kind of car they drove. And two of them were driving these macho big things like

Ferrari's and all this and then the last guy, just kind of dropped and it came back that he drove a Mini. Which is funny. What's a masculine thing? But he obviously had the biggest dick.

These young men reflect upon the fact that in contemporary Western culture there is a pervading notion that a big penis is supposedly representative of heightened masculinity. They imply that this notion is virtually forced upon them by contemporary social and cultural standards. Clearly they are also linking such ideology to the broader media, which has been identified in a number of other recent research papers as being a significant social force in the gay community where bodies, and body image in general, are concerned (Drummond, 2005a; 2005b; Duggan & McCreary, 2004). A similar type of perception is held by most of the men in these studies, indicating that penis size plays a role in defining one's masculine identity. Interestingly, all the men reflected upon 'the other', rather than themselves. Of the 30 men interviewed in these research projects none identified themselves as having a small penis. When they did reflect upon their own size it was to suggest they were well proportioned or had a large penis.

One young man did try and provide a viewpoint on all of this by implying a certain standard is required in contemporary Western culture around penis size, and more specifically gay culture where masculine identity is concerned. He reflected upon the notion that everyone is different and that size should not be an issue. The interesting aspect, from an analytic perspective, is the need to identify that his own penis is above "industry standard" size and that he is satisfied. He stated:

For me personally I can't say it has nothing to do with it but I have picked that up. But, I don't think I'm as strict as some people might be. Either that or maybe I'm just more honest. I'm not too upset about the idea of someone not having a particularly big penis. I don't recall myself being upset about it, my own personal size. So I used to view myself as industry standard so to speak. I later found out that I was even above that and still didn't recall any great excitement over that personally. I don't think guys are more masculine just cause of the size of their appendage. Really it gets to a certain point, if they're way, way small then I can understand from that person's point of view that it would affect them, it doesn't affect them to me, for me looking at them if you've got a penis you've got a penis, if it all works there you go, you know.

Finally, one of the men attempted to put the penis size/masculinity debate into some sort of perspective by attempting to address the burgeoning cultural obsession of excess.

Q: Is penis size important to you?

A: No, not really. It's fun, but not really.

Q: Can you explain to me what you mean by fun?

A: I think that there always an interesting time to find out what someone's penis size is. That's always interesting. But once you find out, it doesn't make much difference.

Q: And are there particular dimensions that you're more drawn to?

A: Um. Oh look I'm not really drawn to any, anything, really. Um it's always fascinating to see if it's big, but that's about it. But, as I said, once you see it it's pretty much boring.

Q: Do you think penis size has anything to do with being masculine?

A: Nah.

Q: Not at all?

A: Nah, nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Very few of the men, such as this participant, stated outright that penis size had nothing to do with masculinity. This is an interesting finding worth considerably more exploration. According to the majority of men size, in terms of ones body image, is important in determining one's masculinity. Indeed, the penis constitutes part of a man's overall body image. The contemporary cultural convention for the penis is large. Whether that is an individual preference is another issue.

Conclusion

This paper was never designed to be *the* definitive paper to end the debate on penis size and masculinity among gay men. As we had originally expected, the paper has opened a number of opportunities to explore this relationship further. It is arguable that by anonymously surveying large quantities of gay men across Western cultures on the topic of penis size and masculinity that this would produce stereotypical responses that do little to provide a deeper understanding of this issue. Therefore far more qualitative research is

required. However, in our recent experience an interesting dilemma has emerged where Human Research Ethics Committees are concerned. It seems in the litigious society in which we live that preconceived lines of enquiry around gay men, masculinity and penis size may be difficult to achieve. Therefore, advocating for both a phenomenological approach to the topic of penis size and its associated meaning to gay men, as well as a phenomenological approach to interviewing, is highly desirable. By taking such an approach to interviewing the issues under investigation are given the capacity to unfold on the terms set by the participant(s). Upon reflection this may be advantageous in many instances, as it will allow the participant to guide the interview, thereby enhancing the participatory process.

Clearly, the majority of men in the three research projects that provide the data for this paper claim that penis size *is* important to them in terms of how they construct masculinity. They appear able to recognise the 'bigger is better' notion that pervades Western culture and yet it still drives the way in which they view their ideal male. When given the opportunity to reflect whether this is related to masculine identity the men are comfortable in deflecting this to the 'other'. That is, they do not appear to be prepared to discuss penis size in the context of their own masculinity. This is certainly where the next level of research is required. Future research needs to focus on how men perceive themselves in regards to the size of their own penis. This poses an interesting and somewhat vexed position for the researcher. However, given the ability and the skills of the researcher, together with the appropriate participants, it is an achievable outcome.

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UNDER THE RADAR: AND THE NECESSITY FOR COURAGE

JOHN RYAN

Abstract

This paper explores how being located in regional Australia and inhabiting a sexual identity marked as 'other' positions one as exiled in a place unthinkingly labelled 'home.' In the words of Big Brother 2006, do we need people in our house who 'fly under the radar'? What is the value of citizens in their own eyes who find themselves trained to avoid taking a stand on social justice issues that rob them of their dignity? What if we ourselves are those people? My own identity in this regard is representative. It has been formed out of the emptiness that characterises regional New South Wales and is an existential state of exile that continues into the present in the body and mind I uneasily call 'me.

The heart of the town I grew up in, a town of 5000 people called Narrabri, is best revealed on a Saturday afternoon when the shops have closed and the people are gone, or at night when there is silence and stars overarching the paper houses and patterns of streets. The great sense of vacancy at the centre of the town seeped into my blood even before I was born and has become a trope for my sense of who I may be. At age nine, I tried to run away but what I found when I came to the edge of the town was the meaningless landscape of the North Western slopes and plains stretching away from my centrelessness. There is no belonging there, only a melancholic sense of defeat.

How then is it possible to be an active citizen when one's sense of oneself is an absence? Furthermore, what takes place when one is inwardly marked by a deviant sexuality in a place where hatred is essential for sameness?

Homosexual Rights (like other civil rights movements) remain unfulfilled in Australia. Even though one may find some newsagents in country towns displaying copies of gay magazines like *DNA* and *Blue*, there has been no major shift from the entrenched culture of violence towards homosexual people that has characterised Australian society since colonisation. Country towns in Australia have come to embody a legacy of discrimination that is based on a white heteropatriarchal hegemony. A covert tradition of alienation and fear has

made exiles of people in their own country. This is not simply an issue of sexuality, because when who one is, is fundamentally shaped by a lack of belonging and acceptance, one is utterly alone. What community exists when one is an exile? And how can it be nurtured by a foreign soil when the earth itself is alien?

There are two areas of focus in this commentary. The first is to explore the way Australian culture, attitudes and values exiles homosexual people (among others also in exile) in their 'home'. The second area is that of the problematic nature of that word 'home': how can you feel at home here at all?

When I began teaching in a local, regional high school, my mother offered me the following advice. She said, "John, be careful – there's a lot of hatred for homosexuals in the country". She meant, there is no acceptance of gay people in regional Australia. The social landscape is a dangerous place and your best option is to divide yourself in two with your sexuality treated as your secret inner life. That was 12 years ago. More recently, two weeks ago in fact, she related part of a conversation with an old friend:

Doreen Finn asked me if the people you live with are gay.

What did you say? I asked.

I said no. It was none of her business. I wouldn't tell *her*. She's not very open-minded, you know.

Oh mum, why'd you do that?

Do you see what she was asking? She was asking about you.

So, why didn't you just say yes?

It was just so unexpected. She caught me by surprise and I didn't have time to think. Why'd she ask me that anyway?

My mother panicked, lied and then was ashamed. Until recently, if I was caught off guard, I would have done the same. That's because a repertoire of personal bravery doesn't reach to the aspects of life lived under the radar.

Regional Australia is where I grew up and my mother is right: you are surrounded by enemies

if you grow up homo in regional Australia. You are on enemy territory and although you're told in school that social justice *matters*, there's also what you are not told but nevertheless learn: namely, only some social justice issues are valued, others are not.

In a recent letter to the Anti-homophobia Interagency of the NSW Anti-discrimination board, the NSW Minister for Education Carmel Tebbutt wrote, "There is no place in schools for any form of discrimination or harassment against students or staff. This, (she says) includes discrimination, harassment or vilification against gay or lesbian students and students of same sex families". All well and good. The Minister then says, "There is no doubt *some* gay and lesbian students experience harassment and discrimination in their lives, *sometimes* at school" (Tebbutt, 2006). The guarded use of the words 'some' and 'sometimes' are a clear signal sexuality is not a priority she'll commit to. So although there have been changes in terms of visibility, legislation and public attitudes, there exists a kryptonite core of homophobia that is culturally transmitted and has not shifted at all in my lifetime. My mother's response, just two weeks ago, is an articulation of that fear which paralyses the voices and neutralises the citizenship of an estimated two million homosexual people in this country.

Irene Watson has asked, "What's it mean for the marginal [not] to speak [again]? It is", she says, "a genocide of voice" (Watson, 2006). Although Watson is speaking specifically about Indigenous Australians, here silenced by a culture of whiteness, her words have resonance with my own experience, of finding and sustaining a voice as a non-heterosexual being, nonetheless one accorded white privilege. The fear of violence and judgement that shaped my own experiences of growing up in regional Australia over thirty years ago is still being internalised, performed and reproduced in families, schools, media and through various powerful political voices & lobby groups. (The recent overturning of the ACT civil unions bill has been a key example of a perception that the other must remain deviant and therefore in exile.)

At a recent conference in Sydney, 200 educators heard a range of speakers on experiences in a range of disciplines from Pre-school teaching to University research. (*That's So Gay*, 2006). It was positive to see how powerful theoretical perspectives are being translated into significant, practical initiatives. But what was

also fundamentally clear was the continuing recognition that Australian society and its sites of education are the breeding grounds of prejudice and trauma for homosexual people.

According to the NSW anti-discrimination board, 74% of violence in Australian society is some form of homophobic abuse; 85% of all this is abuse that happens in schools. So much for Carmel Tebbutt's 'sometimes'. By the time children leave pre-school, argues Sydney academic Dr Kerry Robinson (2006), it is already too late, they have been silently positioned to see the world through heteronormative glasses darkly. Weaning the young on a diet of mock weddings and cute mummy and daddy role-plays programs 'appropriate' behaviour. Glimpses of the wide potentials of being human will be *viscerally* rejected because prejudice – meanness itself – is internal and inarticulate.

This lack of an utterance is a central issue. How can there be a problem at all when silence is how you learn your sexuality? *Silence*, as the ACTUP slogan of the 1980's says, *Is Death*. If it doesn't seem like a problem exists it is probably because it is very bad indeed. In the school where I teach, I recently asked staff for a show of hands if they had had students explicitly tell them they were gay or lesbian. One teacher in a staff of over 50 half raised her hand. I might add she had earlier in the year told me about the creepy feeling that her 'one student' gave off to another boy he was interested in. Obviously gay here meant 'unhealthy interests'. But I digress: the point is: what does it say when a school of 790 students has one gay student. What is the effect on the one? Surely, at the least, it displaces the student from that sense of being related which Desmond Tutu says is the definer of us as human, *Ubuntu*.

Where is the community of perhaps 80 or 100 homosexual people in my school? The answer is, they are invisible. In every school you hear the word gay used as a label of derision – it is normative and though many students declare they are not deploying the word with its homo connotations in mind, many others will state they believe it is also a loaded term signifying that gay is bad. I tried an experiment in my year ten class while we were studying the 'tradition' of voices of protest against war these last hundred years. I showed them a postcard: *this one*.



Archive Holdings Inc./The Image Bank/Getty Images

I showed them the first half of the caption as I talked, and then I revealed the bottom half. They made immediate retching sounds: not everyone, *just* the majority.

The majority of gay people in my regional Australian school and in the nation live under the radar. What benefit then is their local community to them, and conversely, what exactly do they contribute in a positive sense to the community? For that matter, what benefit have I been as an example of how to address my own sense of exile?

In the recent series of *Big Brother*, the public were instructed to vote off those who went under the radar, because it meant they were not adding anything to the BB house. That is to say, they were not 'being themselves', which was defined as reason enough for being evicted. But homosexual people in society have already been evicted, though they may exist everywhere. Unfortunately, in a context where everyone 'like you' is in hiding because being in hiding has been constructed as intrinsic to being gay, the only thing you learn to do is put yourself in hiding too. It is identity as synonymous with exile as strategy of survival.

There is no self-respect when you are in hiding, no love can exist there, no connection is free of the taint of deception. This is what heteronormativity generates: fear, the feeling 'I am a coward and, I suspect, anger. Virginia

Woolf's thesis: how can a woman write and live, incandescently and freely in her creativity, when she is filled with the sense of injustice; the rage of it, Woolf argues, will infuse and impair all she tries to create, and speaks to us nearly 100 years since she wrote *A Room of One's Own* (Woolf, 1984). A profound social injustice exists towards gay people and it is perpetrated by everyone in society who does not actively challenge it, because the status quo is always made perpetual through tacit assent.

The Australian landscape has its role to play in all this too. It is the home of exile for gay people in regional Australia. I doubt if there is really anyone who does not feel the irrelevance of white values, bodies and structures in this land. Underlying all aspects of the social fabric is an extraordinary, powerful emptiness. Nowhere is this more apparent than country towns like Narrabri, the one I grew up in: one thousand kilometres west of the coast and in the middle of nowhere. Imagine the detritus left as a king tide retreats and you have a sense of how disconnected and fundamentally arbitrary the remnants of invasion have become. The settler tide has retreated and all around each of these localities is the emptiness of the landscape. From what do you draw your strength, your being if not from nature? What sustains and enriches you? It is silent in country towns. Trucks on the highway and one or two night birds haunt the empty streets while people take refuge inside modules called houses with much television noise to cut the ether trails of awareness of the alien domain they float their lives on. It is the foreignness of the ancient unconscious they fight to ignore. The historical exile that has positioned (white) Australian identity as itself *other* has a number of consequences for individuals. In these meaningless sands we are all strangers. And, for those deviating in their sexuality, what underlies the sense of exile is another deeper sense of rejection: the disdain of the land they call home.

When I was a child I remember attempting to run away. I convinced another boy to come too. I told him it was the adventure of our lives, a phrase I'd probably pinched from Saturday afternoon matinees. I understood that I was scared when our mothers roared up in their Holdens and caught us at the edge of town. What I didn't understand was the negation of my existence that occurred when Jimmy T and I crested the railway line that circled the south of the town and I looked out over the last wire fence. There was no direction, no sites I

understood, nowhere to go. It was incomprehensible. No hope, no palace, nothing: the never-never was all there is. I was lost in my own place and therefore, eventually the feeling I was trapped percolated up from the underground rivers of the outback. The Australian landscape did not speak to me, but viscerally I understood the messages I received about the cultural imperatives of fear and cowardice were mirrored back to me by nature itself. Potentially, the capacity for freedom from normative bonds of belonging this offered were enormous, but an understanding of the liberation of negation was not in the program. Like others I have had to build the wheel myself.

What then have I learned? It's simple. Personal acts of courage matter. If we don't articulate our exile we accept the terms laid down by the oppressors, whether they be our relatives or our relativity. We can't afford to live under the radar.

Author Note

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LESBIAN AND GAY BODIES IN QUEER SPACES

SHARON CHALMERS

Abstract

In 2001 I was asked to step out of my comfort zone as an academic to co-curate¹ and research an exhibition about lesbian and gay lives at a regional museum in western Sydney. The exhibition drew on the experiences, geo-cultural images and voices of individual and community members, lives that usually remain invisible to those who live where the pink dollar is actively sought, and where it's chic and relatively safe to be 'gay'. As an academic it opened up opportunities to develop new ways of communicating information and stories in a non-traditional form, one which lent itself to working across several communities and disciplines. The result was a coming together of various communities – lesbian, gay and straight – into unusual but generally positive relationships that instilled many people with a sense of pride and well-being.

Introduction

The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is now well embedded in the spatial process of transnational capitalism, bringing in more pink and not-so-pink dollars than any other spectacle on the Sydney calendar. It has also overwhelmingly been represented through the voices, eyes and images of those who reside, work and play in the inner-city areas of Sydney. Breaking away from this tradition, in 2001 I was invited to research and co-curate an exhibition entitled *Edges: Lesbian, gay and queer lives in Western Sydney*. The show drew on the diverse lives, experiences and art forms of lesbians and gays living in what is generally referred to as the outer western 'burbs of Sydney.² Compared to the large inner-city museums, regional museums attract much smaller audience numbers and budgets, and often depend on their local communities and businesses to contribute significant in-kind support and interest.

This article is not a review piece but rather a critical examination of a process in which several interactive and affective contact zones emerged before, during and after the exhibition. Those who eventually became involved in the production included a diverse range of stakeholders – individuals, businesses, academics, government institutions and community organisations. This wide-ranging alliance formed the basis of what began as an experiment to challenge the assumption that provocative (meaning both enabling and challenging) exhibitions should literally know their place, that is, they should stay in inner-urban centres where there is an assumed level of safety. In contrast, this exhibition confronted the boundaries and margins of place and identity. The margins I refer to are first, a regional museum in the outer suburbs of Sydney, that is, western Sydney. Second, the marginality of hybrid identities including sexuality, 'race', ethnicity and class. And finally, it was an attempt to move beyond the boundaries of conventional individual academic production, that is, the written text or monograph.

Crossing Queer Spaces

Western Sydney has been generally perceived by the media and politicians as a space to pathologise through an all too simplistic conflation of negative representations including those of class (working class and aspirational voters); cultural difference (the crisis of multiculturalism); sexual deviance ('ethnic' gang rapes) and location (uncontained and uncontrollable spaces). At the same time, it also extols its own virtues as an untapped space of creativity, using its marginal status as a way to constitute distinct, imaginative and resourceful communities. This geo-political tension revealed itself in the fear expressed, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, by the co-curator of the show on the day the exhibition opened. As the three flags – the rainbow, Aboriginal land rights and Australian national flag – were hoisted up the flag-pole at the side of a major western Sydney highway, there was some thought given to the possibility of being the victim of a drive-by shooting. Fortunately, this did not eventuate.

¹ My co-curator was the then resident curator of the Liverpool Regional Museum, Ricardo Peach. I would like to thank Ricardo for his input into the discussions that preceded the writing of this article.

² Liverpool is approximately 25 kilometres from the centre of Sydney and is one of the most multicultural areas in Sydney.

There were several well-known gay and lesbian individuals who may have, at first glance, seemed obvious to involve in this project. However, they all represented the highly educated, Anglo-Australian, middle-class 'out there' gay or lesbian stereotype. While every story is different, this group tends to have the political and social capital to, on the whole, positively negotiate their marginality. In contradistinction, I was particularly interested in finding out the more routine or everyday lives of people who had grown up, lived and worked in the area. I began by contacting several community groups.

One of the first places I visited was the local Liverpool Lesbian Group. I went to their meeting where I proceeded to get up and explain the proposed project: to hold an exhibition at Liverpool Regional Museum, exploring the social history and diversity of lesbian and gay lives in western Sydney. I came with a post-modern title that I thought was particularly catchy, something like 'In-difference at the Edges'. Standing at a whiteboard, attempting to deconstruct the title for the women in front of me I was met with a sea of blank faces which could only be read as 'What has this got to do with me?' The second encounter was a meeting with a worker from a local women's resource centre. After I had spent about 15 minutes explaining the aims and potential outcomes of the project, her response was 'I have to be honest, I hate academics', followed by 'what's in it for us?' I walked out of both these initial endeavours feeling as though the space between my intellectual intent and the complexity of interpreting their everyday lives was insurmountable. My ideas were already lost in translation to the very people I was trying to attract. While several people expressed an interest in participating, they couldn't quite see how they would fit into a process that for all intent and purposes had already been decided. As many academics involved in various partnerships have now come to realise:

Collaborating with others – intellectual strangers – who have very different professional backgrounds and concerns fundamentally alters the position and practice of the academic scholar. S/he no longer has the luxury of pursuing, linearly, his or her own interests or 'curiosity', but has to step into an interdiscursive contact zone, where divergent knowledges are put into sometimes uneasy interaction with each other. (Ang, 2006, pp. 194-195)

As a result, I began by becoming better acquainted with the vast area that is western Sydney. I also built up contacts with various groups, attended functions, meetings and tried to find out what the participants would like to gain from the exhibition. I enlisted the support of two professional photographers who were well-known within the Mardi Gras artistic circle (from inner-city Sydney)³ and two amateur photographers (from western Sydney), one of the latter photographers being the initially ambivalent worker at the Resource Centre. The aim was to create images of western Sydney from all their respective perspectives and to juxtapose their work throughout the exhibition space.

The next challenge was attracting people who generally didn't attend museums to first come and see the space and second to imagine with them how the space might be used to capture a snapshot of their lives. Liverpool Regional Museum, when the location was initially described to participants, did not spring to mind as a well-known landmark. Moreover, for those who did know the building, they were generally unaware that it was their local museum. For most participants, therefore, the process of entering and inhabiting this unfamiliar public domain as self-identified lesbian, gay, queer, Aboriginal and/or culturally diverse persons needed to be negotiated so that they felt their stories could be expressed in a relatively safe place.

The show incorporated a variety of mediums including a collection of oral histories that were produced on CD-rom, fashion, film, photography, poetry, group narratives and individual personal stories as well as a range of archival material. While there have been several queer exhibitions in inner-city Sydney, this was the first time a show such as this had been attempted in an area that is not known for its tolerant attitudes towards lesbians and gays. Indeed, there was some trepidation expressed about whether this subject matter might be too provocative for a hitherto fairly conservative public institution to negotiate. It dealt with fundamental questions of whose social history is 'real' and 'valuable', where and in what form it should appear, what constitutes healthy communities, and what is the role of a public institutional space, such as a museum, in

³ The two photographers were Garrie Maguire and Amanda James.

reflecting the social values and daily practices of their heterogeneous constituencies?

The aim was not simply a celebration or space for 'coming out' stories but an 'interdiscursive contact zone' where their different experiences, values and knowledges could be explored within a traditionally elite institutional context. An environment that had the potential to celebrate their lives while coming into 'edgy' or painful zones of contact with and against each other – whether that be individually, within families or among diverse communities, including the museum, "often within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt, 1992, p. 7). For Maggie,⁴ a survivor of the lost generation and who dealt with multidimensional unequal power relations – between black and white politics, between black and queer politics, and between both of these and living below the poverty line – she constantly felt at odds with her shifting inter-subjectivity:

At times I've found it hard to deal with [being lesbian and Aboriginal] because it's taken me a long time to maintain my identity as an Aboriginal person, and I fear losing my identity within my community. There would be a lot of people who I wouldn't divulge my sexuality to. But now I think I've just come to the point where I think well, why should I be worried? Number one, I'm an individual person... I don't want to not belong in my community, and it's like I live in two communities. One is my Aboriginal community and one is my homosexual community. The big thing that's going on now is reconciliation between black and white but will there ever not be a stigma of homosexuality? Who can answer that? Maybe not in our lifetime... maybe if there was reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous people it would give all aspects of life a different understanding, maybe. I don't know!

To some extent, the exhibition gave the participants a space to explore these contact zones and to articulate their multiple crossings – spatially, politically, sexually and culturally. Multi-dimensionality, Darren Hutchinson asserts, is a complex, multi-directional and multi-layered approach (Hutchinson, 1999), one that in the

context of this exhibition demonstrated the interconnectedness of the impact and nature of gender, sexuality, 'race', ethnicity, location and history. Raced, sexed and gendered bodies have forever been inseparable from each other, always already written into the history and onto the walls of museums, including the Liverpool Regional Museum. Yet, until this exhibition, their significance had remained benignly unmarked through the uncritical representation of both famous people and as a repository of artefacts of Liverpool and its surrounding areas. That is, they were concealed by more conventional institutional and regional classifications as is stated on the museum's website:

The Museum is interested in artefacts of significance (or uniqueness) to the Liverpool area (e.g., an item made in Liverpool, or by a local person, or brought to Liverpool by immigrants).⁵

This was manifestly evident by the one permanent exhibition at the museum: a display of how the Australian land and peoples were colonised and shaped through the portrayal of a dominant history of white (masculine) survival in a dangerous and inhospitable environment. This exhibit was simultaneously on show during the Edges exhibition. Indeed, the spatial, material and symbolic representation of the two exhibitions running in parallel for some became highly contentious. In one case, a member of 'The Friends of the Museum' felt that the Edges exhibition belittled, demeaned and trivialised the authority and legitimacy of 'their' area's 'authentic' colonial past. This individual's anger was demonstrated by way of a tirade of abuse about the incommensurability of the two exhibitions in a public institution on the morning of the day that *Edges* was scheduled to be launched.

Similarly, after the exhibition began I overheard two white Anglo-Australian women who were in a group of older visitors to the museum commenting on the show in the following way: 'Why do *they* always have to be so flamboyant and in your face?' This was interesting, given that compared to exhibitions in the inner-city portraying for example, '20-years of Mardi Gras parade fashions', we felt our attempts were rather subdued. However, for these women, this was not the 'right kind of place' for this particular exhibition. In a less confrontational

⁴ The personal narratives by Maggie and Penny presented in this article were collected as part of the exhibition. Each narrative was recorded and edited on CD rom. These stories could be heard on CD players located throughout the exhibition space and were accompanied by a large portrait of the participant with a further edited narrative label hanging next to it.

⁵ See Liverpool Regional Museum's website at: <http://www.liverpool.nsw.gov.au/liverpoolregionalmuseum.htm>

incident, indeed almost conciliatory, one staff member expressed her surprise after watching the comings and goings of many of the participants in offering their input into the production of the space, and commented on how 'normal' most of 'them' looked and behaved.

Tapping Into Untold Stories

The overwhelmingly common stereotype of 'the homosexual' in recent Australian popular representations has been based on the assumption that gay, lesbian and queer lives are a never-ending party. The explosion in popularity of the Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras highlights the stereotypical images that many heterosexual people hold on to. The Mardi Gras Parade is held annually at the end of the Mardi Gras Cultural Festival and with the vast publicity and media attention that it draws it is often the only point of reference that heterosexual people have to gay, lesbians and queers. For example, Narrelle, who is the mother of a gay son and now an active member of PFLAG⁶ western Sydney said:

I used to think that the Mardi Gras was the pits; it was just a group of people being exhibitionists to the absolute nth degree. And now I've walked [in Mardi Gras] twice, and I'm so proud of my son!

Mainstream Western understandings of 'coming out' are usually based on some kind of public statement or action – whether that be to friends, family, work colleagues or the media – where one identifies as lesbian, gay, or queer. It is to state a position to the outside heterosexual majority either socially or politically, in order to be included socially or politically inside. Yet, as Judith Butler (1993) points out, how can one talk about a subject when the subject does not discursively exist? How do Indigenous and migrant women who identify or who are questioning their sexuality engage with issues of religion, class, education, employment, marriage, language, or familial expectations? When 'home' and 'family' is often a sanctuary from systematic racism or discrimination – whether intentional or not – the decision to 'come out' can become extremely complicated, and at times life threatening.

Penny grew up in a Greek extended family where several members of the family (three generations) lived together in the family home in western Sydney. In 2000, Penny was diagnosed with clinical depression and experienced a nervous breakdown, taking two months off work. From one side, she was being pressured to come out by her Anglo-Australian girlfriend, while on the other side she was absolutely convinced that she would be cut off from her family if she did:

Each Greek family has a reputation in the community. Everyone knows everyone; everyone knows what everyone is doing. You're only successful if you marry your kids off and if they have kids. Single Greek children don't look good! My partner gave me an ultimatum that I had to come out to my parents or lose her... That's when I fell into a big heap and I came back to the family home. I came to the point where I couldn't get out of bed, I just lay under my doona and cried and cried and felt like the worst person in the world for what I did to my partner. I felt like the biggest liar and cheat to my parents and put all this blame and guilt on myself and fell deeper into this depression... I felt so lost.

One day stands out. I was hiding under my doona, my usual place, balling my eyes out. Mum and Dad came upstairs and they didn't know what was happening and all these things were going through their heads... My brother (who knew) came upstairs and said 'Penny, get up!' and he threw me into the car and took me for a drive all the way to Penrith. He bought me all this food and made me eat 'cause I'd lost about 12 kilos. He said when we get home you're going to tell Mum and Dad. And I said no way in the world. I thought they were going to throw me out. So he brought me back home and I got back under my doona and my Dad came upstairs and said 'Penny, I think you should tell me what's wrong.' Eventually he asked me 'You're not gay are you?' and I said 'yes'... Three nights later I was again under my doona and my Mum's out of her mind [still not knowing] and sitting on my bed. 'My baby' she said, 'what's wrong? Please tell me', crying, splashing holy water on me, doing the big cross on my forehead. So Dad comes into the room, (everything happens in my room, with me under the doona and everyone sitting on my bed), and Dad said 'Maria, don't worry about it, you'll find out in good time.'

Little analysis has been undertaken on the intersections of race, ethnicity and a critique of heterosexism on the health and well-being of minority sexualities. This situation is perpetuated by the fact that empirical research on sexual diversity has overwhelmingly dealt with white, middle-class participants (Greene, 1996; Greene

⁶ PFLAG – Parents and friends of lesbian and gays is an Australian-wide organisation and there is an active group in western Sydney.

& Boyd-Franklin, 1996). From the alternative perspective those researching ethnic minority groups have assumed universal heterosexuality – at times the taking on of another overt identity, such as a 'queer' identity, being read as a repudiation of their racial or ethnic background (Chalmers, 2001; Jackson & Sullivan, 1999).

These factors do not manifest themselves in a cultural vacuum and white lesbian and male gay communities are by no means free from racism. Popular myths circulate about the homogeneity of particular ethnic/racial communities (Ahmad, 1993; Jackson & Sullivan, 1999). Ironically, this is a claim that many Anglo-European self-identified lesbian and gay men are quick to reject about themselves. Nevertheless, even within research about gays and lesbians there is a persistent assumption that presents the white middle-class man/woman with an above average income and education as the generic stereotype (Stevens, 1992; Ussher, 2000), while those outside these representations remain virtually invisible (Pitman, 2000). What is known, however, is that through a combination of racism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia and eurocentrism, those who do not fit the more mainstream representations of lesbian, gay or queer life often face extreme stress and general poor health as exemplified by the former narrative which was presented in the exhibition. Moreover, taking the former homophobic internal institutional responses juxtaposed to stories such as told by Penny and Maggie creates a challenge to the contemporary social inclusion rhetoric within institutions such as museums about "difference, belonging and worth" (Sandell, 2007, p. 7).

Fragments of Contemporary Histories

The end result of this exhibition was not only the completed display itself, but just as importantly a story of the relationship between the process of producing the exhibition and the physical and normative structures and practices of the museum as a (postcolonial) institution. As Rose asserts, the process of producing an exhibition entails "moments of communication rather than representation" and through "raising self-esteem and confidence in the [broader] community... participants are changed through their participation in a project" (Rose, 1997, p. 196).

As mentioned, one of the ways we drew attention to both the museum and the exhibition

was to exhibit the three flags – an attempt to symbolise both the tensions as well as the lived realities of the diverse communities living in this large region. Thus, even for those who did not attend the exhibition, the flags enacted a marker of change in the role of this museum. Several people commented on the fact that they didn't think they would ever see the day when a lesbian and gay rainbow flag would fly publicly in outer western Sydney. It also attracted some people's attention because of the inherent contradictions that permeated racialised (homo)sexualities set within this postcolonial setting.

What remains to be discussed are the fragmented remains in the aftermath of the exhibition closing. We had asked one of the museum workers to create a black and white ink curtain backdrop with a 'typical' western Sydney weatherboard home painted onto it. On its completion, and in a stroke of 'lunacy' as my co-curator muttered under his breath at the time, I decided that what we needed was a Hills hoist at the entrance to the exhibition. Where would we find an old-fashioned clothes line this close to the opening? I promptly rang the Hills Hoist company, who just happened to be located in western Sydney. After extolling the virtues and the iconic place of Hills hoists in western Sydney's history, and slipping in that it was for a gay and lesbian exhibition, they said they would consider my request. Within five minutes they had rung back and agreed to lend us one. We immediately went to pick it up before they changed their mind.

Underneath the Hills hoist was placed a table, covered by a red-checked tablecloth, several marker pens, and an array of rainbow-coloured handkerchiefs in a clothes-basket with pegs below. On exiting the show, audience members were invited to write a comment and attach their handkerchief to the line, which by the end of the exhibition was full. Many expressed their fears of growing up in western Sydney and not being able to live openly – indeed, for some it was their first time back. As we took down the clothes-line and read all the comments, we felt this vestige of the exhibition needed to be retained in some form. My co-curator contacted the Liverpool Quilting Society, who agreed to our design of sewing the comments around the outside of the backdrop curtain.

Other ongoing reminders of the exhibition included extensive media interest, an invitation to visit a Scottish lesbian and gay group who

were planning a similar exhibition, and phone calls and cards exactly a year on from several participants whose lives had been touched by their involvement in the exhibition. The following year, I also applied for a small grant to examine specific health issues affecting lesbians in western Sydney. This information as well as the stories collected for *Edges*, were integrated into a subsequent exhibition at Liverpool Regional Museum in 2002 entitled, *Just Sensational: Queer Histories of Western Sydney*. This latter exhibition was partly funded by South Western Sydney Area Health Service and the catalogue incorporated an extensive list of Community Services for the lesbian, gay and queer communities in the region. Finally, as part of this queer history, the quilt was also exhibited, taking its place in the social history of lesbian and gay lives in western Sydney.



Photo from the exhibition, *Just Sensational! Queer Histories of Western Sydney*, Courtesy of Liverpool Regional Museum and Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, 2002.

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BOOK REVIEW

SHAUN M. FILIAULT

Bergling, T. (2007). Chasing Adonis: Gay men and the pursuit of perfection. New York: Harrington Park Press, ISBN: 978-1-56023-508-8, pp. 278.

Having written previously on the seemingly taboo topics of queer aging, and gay effeminacy, Tim Bergling's latest book, *Chasing Adonis*, examines another gay culture unmentionable: the role of body aesthetics in Western gay society. And, be sure, while Bergling provides critiques of those on both sides of the "body beautiful" debate, his own viewpoint is abundantly clear. He likes pretty boys with big muscles, and he isn't afraid to admit it.

The text opens with a forward by syndicated gay columnist Greg Herren, who typically writes about gay men's health and exercise. Herren's foreword is little more than a thinly veiled defense of the body beautiful and those who chase it. Of course, such a defense is made ironic by his citing Signorile's (1997) classic *Life Outside*, which, a decade earlier, demonstrated the extreme problems associated with muscle worship. Perhaps a better understanding of that literature which he cites would demonstrate to Herren the very problem with the viewpoint he espouses.

Though, to Herren's defense, at least he seems to know some of the body image literature (or at least the major titles), which is knowledge Bergling himself cannot claim. Indeed, the text makes the cardinal sin of not knowing the history of the field it discusses. This shortcoming is best exemplified by the failure to cite Pope, Phillips and Olivardia's (2000) seminal text *The Adonis Complex*, which is a shocking omission given the book's subject matter and title. That oversight is not alone, as the text's reference list is little more than a listing of popular articles, many of which were penned by Bergling himself. A more thorough review of the literature on gay men's bodies would have provided the text with additional depth and complexity, making it a ground-breaking addition to the body

image literature. Instead, it comes off as popular fodder.

Despite its obvious flaw and bias, Bergling's research is compelling. The book examines the results of hundreds of one-on-one interviews and Internet questionnaires completed by (primarily American) openly gay men. Findings are presented in seven chapters. After a brief overview of the findings, the book launches into a chapter-by-chapter of five major themes to emerge from the data:

- The 'whys' of attraction
- Media role in body image
- Body types in forming gay culture
- Rejection
- Importance of looks in finding a mate.

The final chapter provides a simple statistical overview of the results from the online surveys.

The men Bergling interviewed provided a range of responses. Regarding the reasons behind physical attraction, the men expressed opinions on both poles of the typical 'nature versus nurture' debate. Despite some efforts to provide insight from such disparate fields as neurobiology and queer theory (all, of course, without citing literature), Bergling ultimately opts for the trite, concluding, "it's hard to say, precisely" (p. 47) why individuals are attracted to one another. While accurate in its conciliatory nature (we *aren't* completely certain as to the nature of attraction), it would have been refreshing to see Bergling answer the question with the same type of openness he did when proclaiming his love of muscle men. Ultimately, the reader is left to decide.

So, too, did participants provide a myriad of opinions regarding the role of the body in gay culture. "I like to think that a lot of the unhappiness, and sometimes bitterness, that I feel about gay life would vanish if I could manage to shave off some fat" muses one unhappy participant (p. 103); "In the gay world it's completely acceptable to laugh at fat men" suggests another (p. 98). Such responses are

countered with claims that "I hate it when I hear fat guys whine about being fat. Drop your cupcakes and get your ass in the gym" (p. 251). That is a position Bergling himself seemingly takes, as he claims "simple exercise" (p. 76) can help men to achieve an ideal body, exhibiting no appreciation of the harm such suggestions have caused to many men.

Despite attempts to provide a balanced overview of these positions, Bergling's own opinions are clear. Nowhere is that bias more evident than in the Afterword. Describing his response to an inflammatory e-mail from a body image dissatisfied young man, Bergling says "clearly my un-happy little e-bomber has so many issues with his own lack of self-esteem that he has to project, pulling the pin on each of his smoldering insecurities then lobbing them at me like hand grenades" (p 268). Clearly, however, Bergling does not realise that it is perhaps the over-emphasis on the body, such as that which both he and Herren espouse, that leads to such self-esteem issues to begin with.

While the actual data presented is intriguing to those interested in the body in gay culture, Bergling's text itself leaves much to be desired. If nothing else, it stands as a monument to the continued over-emphasis of the body on gay culture, and the extremes some may take to defend that aesthetic.

Author Note

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BOOK REVIEW

ADRIAN BOOTH

Suresha, R.J., & Chvany, P. (Eds.). (2005). Bi men: Coming out every which way. New York: Harrington Park Press. ISBN: 978-1-56023-615-3, pp. 329.

Ron Jackson Suresha and Pete Chvany, who have authored several other works on bisexual people and who are active in bisexual teachings, have assembled an extensive range of contributors in this text who describe through personal experience and story their lives as bisexual men. There are also perspectives from female authors as well which provides for an additional female perspective on bisexuality. Drawn mostly from the United States, but also including contributions from Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom, the collection portrays predominately men's accounts of how they have created and maintained bisexual identities; struggled against bi-phobia arising out of the gay community; and navigated their ways through married and single lives as bisexual men. The book is dedicated to Alfred C. Kinsey, the sexologist who is perhaps best known for the Kinsey scale on which heterosexuality and homosexuality is measured as well as disputing the notion that our sexual identities and behaviours are exclusively either heterosexual or homosexual. The book therefore has a 'fluidity' feel about it, which I regard as important as it challenges and reminds the reader that our sexual identities are not exclusively homosexual or heterosexual. I guess the book is testament to, using a sporting metaphor, the possibility and actuality of 'batting for both teams'.

The book is organised in a way that the reader can easily follow. I am not able to go through every contribution in the book for this review however I will choose a selection that I found of most interest. Part 1 looks at *discovering a bisexual self*. Andrew Milnes provides an Australian perspective on his bisexual attractions along with 'coming out' issues in his contribution entitled *Walking the Shifting Sands*. Milnes describes well his experiences of identity formation, a process that can be tiring and confusing in the pursuit of a label of best

fit. What I like about Milnes' chapter is that the sense of 'struggle' is not seen as a journey that is filled with psychological distress, but rather as an opportunity for new sexual and emotional exploration. Another contribution within the 'discovery' section of the text is by Larry Lawton whose story is captured in *The Road to Reality*. Lawton, a bisexual man who is incarcerated in a South Caroline prison, reflects on his life, which includes several marriages to women, sexual politics within a prison system and his role as a lover and mentor to other bisexual men in prison. The article describes Larry's journey towards inner peace as a bisexual man and relationships with other men.

As a practising psychologist I often work with married men who are questioning their sexuality and are exploring their lives as men who love their wives but are also sexually attracted to other men. Part 2 of the book deals with this population group. As with Part 1 there are several contributions by men who are or have lived married lives. Notable inclusions come from Moss Stern whose chapter is entitled *Minus the Sexual*. Moss challenges the stereotype of the bisexual man as promiscuous, a slut and having sex anytime, anywhere with men and women. Stern's premise is that being able to be close emotionally to other bisexual men and women enables him to articulate his bisexual self which is not exclusively based on having sex, hence challenging the 'sex with anything that moves' stereotype. Koen Brand from the Netherlands offers an interesting insight into negotiated sex and intimacy with other men outside of marriage. Brand describes how he, through a trusting, open relationship with his wife, has integrated a bisexual life for himself within the marriage. I enjoyed reading this contribution as I think it provides a very good narrative of how people can, through negotiation, create open relationships which are fuelled by inquiry and exploration rather than being dismissed by the common societal perceptions of such relationships not working or never existing due to problems of mistrust, jealousy and risk of increased STI's and/or

HIV/AIDS. Themes that are captured in other chapters in Part 2 relate to parenting, acceptance, choosing to stay or leave the marriage, responsibility and pursuing long-term fulfilment.

Part 3 offers a community 'connectedness' perspective. Entitled *Interacting in Evolving GLBTQ Communities*, the chapters describe varied and diverse ways of connecting to communities that are sexually diverse in nature. This is where the book for me starts to come alive as images and scenes of political struggle, activism and advocacy predominate. Patrick Califia, a bisexual kinky ex-Mormon transman (female to male) describes a journey of self-discovery regarding sex with men and women against a backdrop of feminist activism and the politics associated with undergoing sex change. Woody Glen in *Thirty Years Out* reflects on his 'coming out' experiences in the early 1970's. Glen argues that bisexuality was viewed very negatively by both gay men and lesbians. Through activist and support work in Boston and being involved with developing bisexual networks, Glen talks about what 'community' means to him. Another interesting article is by Raven Davis, a straight female author of 'slash fiction' which rewrites mainstream media into gay themed erotic fiction. According to Davis, female slashers prefer their favourite male characters to be with other males thus highlighting women's interest in male sexuality. Slash according to Davis is a "truly bisexual art" (p.202) appealing to bisexual and gay men and straight women.

Part 4, the final section of the book, focuses on bisexuality within a spiritual context. Entitled *Bridge-Building in Bisexual Spirit*, contributions focus on the coming out experience that Michael Ambrosino eloquently describes in his chapter *Choosing Not To*, promoting a message of hope to other bisexual men to accept and contribute to their communities. Exploration of bisexuality within eastern spiritual traditions is covered well by Ganapati S. Durgadas, who talks about multiple selves and spiritual fulfilment in his chapter *Whereto, My Beloved?* Chuck Greenbeart Bradley in *Liquid Ritual* describes how he honours his sexual fluidity with a ritual drawn from Celtic traditions, and one of my

favourites in this section of the book is Wayne Bryant's article *Is That Me Up There?*, a review of male bisexuality in Hollywood and how it is often negatively depicted. I must admit to being a big movie fan and thoroughly enjoyed *The Celluloid Closet*, the 1995 documentary of gay themes on the big screen. Bryant however focuses on male bisexuality in his contribution with bisexual actors including Cary Grant, Rock Hudson and Montgomery Clift. Bryant argues that bisexual themes are often missing from movies, however stereotypical themes such as bisexual men as sexually promiscuous predominate.

In summary I enjoyed reading this book. The stories are largely American based experiences but translate well, I would think, to non-American audiences. As Suresha states in the introduction section, the stories contained in the book do build on one another and I found the stories to be more personal than academic in nature. Therefore this book would be well suited to men who may view or identify as bisexual to assist with personal discovery and growth. I would also see the book as being applicable to clinicians, health workers and others who work with and alongside bisexual men. The book is a worthy accompaniment to existing texts on bisexuality.

Author Note

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BOOK REVIEW

ANTHONY VENN-BROWN

Jones, S.L., & Yarhouse, M.A. (2000). Homosexuality: The use of scientific research in the church's moral debate. Illinois: Intervarist Press, ISBN: 0830815678, pp. 189.

The subtitle of this work could just as easily have been "*The Misuse of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate*". I think the only real value in reading this book is to get an idea of how far removed some Christian commentators are from the realities of life and what it really means to be homosexual in the 21st century.

Early in the work, the authors state their position:

We believe in being clear about our assumptions and presuppositions, so we confess that we are defending the historic understanding of the church, grounded on the Bible's teaching, that homosexuality is immoral. Let us give away our punch line at the very start: We will show, persuasively we hope, that while science provides us with many interesting and useful perspectives on sexual orientation and behaviour, the best science of this day fails to persuade the thoughtful Christian to change his or her moral stance. Science has nothing to offer that would even remotely constitute persuasive evidence that would compel us to deviate from the historic Christian judgment that full homosexual intimacy, homosexual behaviour is immoral. (p. 11)

From this it is clear that the book is written for a conservative Christian audience who still have not worked out that a homosexual orientation, as such, does not automatically determine a person's morality any more than heterosexuality does. Morality is a choice but sexual orientation isn't. To falsely judge a group within society because they are attracted to the same sex and not the opposite by calling that entire group immoral is not only irresponsible but also in conflict with the teachings of Jesus Christ himself.

Chapter 2 is titled 'How Prevalent is Homosexuality?' This seems a strange place to start the argument but not unusual. It has probably been some time now since queer sociologists and commentators have used Kinsey's figure of approximately 10% of people being homosexual in their orientation, but by introducing this question first it serves two

purposes for the authors. Firstly, it gives the impression that we have been deceiving people about our real numbers, and secondly by reducing the numbers any requests for equality are not as important as we make out. After all, if the numbers are 'only' 2-4% of the population, then the conclusion may be reached that we are not all that important. The table on pages 42-43 of 11 different studies in this area does not really prove their point but actually demonstrates how difficult it is to get a definitive number. My feeling is that we will never have an accurate figure until all stigma attached to homosexuality within our society is removed. In the meantime people who experience fluidity in their sexual orientation and heterosexuals who have same-sex experiences are sometimes thrown into the mix.

When referring to scientific research the authors frequently quote from studies done in the 60's, 70's and mid 80's. Even research from the 1950's is cited. Whilst this research may have been valuable at the time, my impression is that it is now considered dated by most professionals. Possible causes of homosexuality according to the authors are strong mother/weak father, early sexual experiences with someone of the same sex, sexual abuse, and new one for me: the 'exotic becomes erotic'. This theory proposes that we eroticise the gender we are not connected with. So 'normal' males will eventually eroticise females but homosexual men eroticise men because they feel distant and unconnected from other males. An interesting theory perhaps but lacks credibility in the light of those who have only known attraction to the same sex from very early childhood.

When dealing with the various biological theories, the authors point to flaws in the research methodology and the exceptions rather than being able to identify what the research is actually saying to us. That is, there are prenatal factors such as genetic and hormonal influences that increase the likelihood, but these do not guarantee a person will be same sex attracted.

I found Chapter 4: 'Is Homosexuality a Psychopathology' to be the most offensive. To quote from the chapter:

The short answer to the question 'Is Homosexuality a Psychopathology' is no, if a person were to mean that the answer can be found by a quick look through the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental Disorders; Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) of the American Psychiatric Association. Homosexuality is not listed as a formal mental disorder in the DSM-IV, and hence is not a 'mental illness'. But as we will see in this chapter, answering the question 'Is Homosexuality a Psychopathology' is much more complicated than simply checking a manual. (p. 94)

The authors go on to expand on research done on the mental health of gay men and lesbians. This is where the writing becomes incredibly biased, using statements like "the hospitalisation rate for homosexuals is 450% higher than the general population.... suggesting over 300% increases in incidence of serious personal distress amongst lesbians" (p. 97) and "the elevated rates of depression, substance abuse and suicide challenge the adaptiveness of homosexuality" (p. 99) reflect the authors' very negative impression of gay men and lesbians. What is not introduced in this chapter are the possible causes of any mental health issues like rejection by family, societal norms of conformity, religious dissonance and even persecution.

There are large amounts of material from the book that demonstrates it has been written with a strong bias and that it is not relevant to the more informed academic or mental health professional. For example, in the summary of the chapter 'Can Homosexuality be Changed?' it says, "the research of sexual orientation is intensely debated today. Most of the research was conducted and published between the 1950's and the 1970's, with an average positive outcome of approximately 30% (p. 124). This stands in contrast to Spitzer's (2003) recent findings that so-called 'reparative therapists' have a cure rate of 0.02%, which means a failure rate of 99.98%.

In the final chapter 'Toward a Christian Sexual Ethic' the authors state:

To summarize, the essential claim in the discussions about the prevalence is that the high prevalence of homosexuality, claimed to be 10% or more of the general population, demands revision of our traditional ethic. The best studies, however suggest a prevalence of between 2 and 3%. More importantly, prevalence has no claim on ethic, since Christians commonly believe that some sinful life patterns are very common such

as *pride* while some are rare like *bestiality*. (p. 172)

On the following page we read:

Even if the homosexual condition of desiring intimacy and sexual union with a person of the same gender is caused in its entirety by causal factors outside the personal control of the person, that does not constitute moral affirmation of acting on those desires. If it did, the *pedophile* who desires sex with children, the *alcoholic* who desires the pursuit of drunkenness, and the person with *Antisocial Personality Disorder* who desires the thrill of victimization and pain infliction would all have an equal case for moral approval of their exploits. (p. 173, my emphases)

One wonders what the authors' solution might be for the 'homosexual condition' if we are equated with paedophiles, alcoholics and anti-social behaviour and later put in the same basket with schizophrenia, panic attacks, witchcraft and greed?

As a gay man from a strong religious background, reading through this book I often found myself asking the question: 'Who are you talking about? I'm not sick, I know I certainly didn't choose to be gay, I wasn't sexually abused, my first sexual experiences were with guys because that is the only attraction I had and my homosexuality is not a problem to me'. I have to conclude that the authors are like many people in conservative religious circles who, because of their negative view of homosexuality, are locked away in a world that conveniently separates them from us and as a result they actually don't know any well-adjusted gay or lesbian people personally. The only homosexual people they have contact with are those in their churches who are tormented by the dissonance created by an outdated religious worldview. The rest of us are living normal lives and making a valuable contribution to society.

Author Note

Anthony Venn-Brown is the author of *A Life of Unlearning* (New Holland Publishers), the co-convenor of Freedom 2b (a support forum for LGBTIQ people from Pentecostal/Charismatic backgrounds), and works as a life coach, for Personal Success Australia. Email: anthony.venn-brown@psalifecoaching.com.

References

Spitzer, R.L. (2003). Can some gay men and lesbians change their sexual orientation? 200 participants reporting a change from homosexual to heterosexual orientation. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 32, 403-417.

QUEER CORNER

A Model for Raising Awareness of Issues Affecting Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, and Same-Sex Attracted (GLBTIQS) People



Queer Corner is an email based information distribution and awareness raising tool which aims to increase health and community service workers' awareness of issues affecting GLBTIQS communities.

Queer Corner is a simple yet effective way of encouraging personal and organisational change around homophobia and heterosexism by providing people with regular, brief, factual information about the issues and barriers for GLBTIQS communities. It is an easy to use tool that can be implemented within any organisation with minimal time and effort required.

You can obtain a **FREE** copy of the Queer Corner CD, which contains all the necessary information to implement and evaluate the project within your workplace by contacting the Project Coordinator (Lauren Riggs) through Dale St Women's Health Centre on 08 8444 0713 or lauren.riggs@health.sa.gov.au.



Government of South Australia

Central Northern Adelaide
Health Service

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Special Issue *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review*

Mental Health and LGBT Communities

Guest Editors: Lynne Hillier, Jane Edwards and Damien W. Riggs

One of the legacies of the well-known histories associated with the misuse of psychology within LGBT communities is a hesitancy in discussing the mental health of such communities. Such hesitancy is understandable not only in regards to the historical treatment of LGBT people by mental health professionals, but also in relation to ongoing attempts at pathologising same-sex attraction (e.g., in the instance of 'reparative therapies'). Nonetheless, there continues to be a pressing need to examine how issues of mental health shape the lives of members of LGBT communities. This involves examining not only how the mental health professions can support LGBT people experiencing poor mental health, but also how LGBT and heterosexual people/practitioners/communities may celebrate individual LGBT people's/communities' experiences of positive mental health.

We seek full-length empirical and theoretical papers (5000 words max) and shorter commentary pieces (2000 words max) that address the following (and related) themes and questions:

- *Research on the supportive role that LGBT communities play in promoting positive mental health
- *Research on the ways in which communities may support individuals in accessing services to address poor mental health
- *Accounts of mental health outcomes amongst LGBT people marginalised within LGBT communities around issues of race, class, ethnicity and religion
- *Examples of successful community and individual interventions relating to LGBT people
- *Research exploring how social norms continue to detrimentally affect LGBT communities and people
- *Suggestions for ways to move forward in research on mental health and LGBT people
- *Means of promoting mental health practice with and by LGBT people
- *Clinical accounts of mental health practice as it is applied to and by LGBT people
- *Accounts of mental health/well being amongst Indigenous LGBT communities

The deadline for submissions (maximum 6000 words) is **June 1st 2008** for publication in August 2008. Informal enquires and submissions should be sent to:

Dr Damien W. Riggs
Editor, GLIP Review
damien.riggs@adelaide.edu.au

Submission guidelines at: http://www.groups.psychology.org.au/glip/glip_review

CALL FOR PAPERS

Special Feature in Feminism & Psychology

Come out, come out, wherever you are? Negotiating sexualities in the higher education classroom

Edited by Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun

Although 'coming out' typically refers to the process of (publicly) declaring a lesbian or gay identity, there are a range of sexual identities and practices that may prompt a coming out. We teach in environments that assume a universal heterosexuality, and for those who possess oppositional sexualities, classrooms (and broader academic environments) are potentially risky spaces. In spite, or because of this, we may experience our identities as a positive element of our teaching. Furthermore, feminist and critical pedagogies encourage us to bring our personal into the classroom. However, the notion that the personal is pedagogical and the potential limitlessness of our sexualities may be experienced as coercive. We seek short (1000–2000 words) contributions that address the following (and other) questions:

- Should teachers come out in the higher education classroom?
- How and why do teachers come out?
- Is coming out personally, politically and pedagogically necessary?
- What challenges do we face in negotiating and performing our identities in both conservative and 'liberal' academic environments?
- What challenges do we face in negotiating our identities in a shifting academic environment?
- What challenges are faced by those teaching in countries outside of the 'liberal west'?
- What are feminist, lesbian and gay, queer and critical perspectives on coming out?
- What risks are there in teaching about sexuality (topics of which we have personal experience)?
- How do we manage and negotiate resistance and hostility from students and colleagues?
- What pressures are there to come out?
- What are the personal, political and pedagogical implications of coming out?
- Should we compel our students and our colleagues to confront our sexualities?
- How is our sexuality implicated in our teaching?
- How do we bring our sexuality into the classroom?

All contributions will be subject to the usual review process. Authors are advised to refer to previous special features such as *A Marriage of Inconvenience? Feminist Perspectives on Marriage* (edited by Sara-Jane Finlay and Victoria Clarke, 13(4)), and *Young Women, Feminism and the Future: Dialogues and Discoveries* (edited by Hannah Frith, 11[2]).

Submissions should be sent to Dr Victoria Clarke. Email victoria.clarke@uwe.ac.uk For informal discussion of contributions, please email us: victoria.clarke@uwe.ac.uk or v.braun@auckland.ac.nz.

Closing date for submissions is 30 November 2007

Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review

Preparation, submission and publication guidelines

Types of articles that we typically consider:

A)

- Empirical articles (4000 word max)
- Theoretical pieces
- Commentary on LGBTI issues and psychology
- Research in brief: Reviews of a favourite or troublesome article/book chapter that you have read and would like to comment on

B)

- Conference reports/conference abstracts
- Practitioner's reports/field notes
- Political/media style reports of relevant issues
- Book reviews (please contact the Editor for a list of books available & review guidelines)
- Promotional material for LGBT relevant issues

The Review also welcomes proposals for special issues and guest Editors.

Each submission in section A should be prepared for blind peer-review if the author wishes. If not, submissions will still be reviewed, but the identity of the author may be known to the reviewer. Submissions for blind review should contain a title page that has all of the author(s) information, along with the title of the submission, a short author note (50 words or less), a word count and up to 5 key words. The remainder of the submission should not identify the author in any way, and should start on a new page with the submission title followed by an abstract and then the body of the text. Authors who do not require blind review should submit papers as per the above instructions, the difference being that the body text may start directly after the key words.

Each submission in section B should contain the author(s) information, title of submission (if relevant), a short author note (50 words or less) and a word count, but need not be prepared for blind review.

All submissions must adhere to the rules set out in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (fifth edition), and contributors are encouraged to contact the Editor should they have any concerns with this format as it relates to their submission. Spelling should be Australian (e.g., 'ise') rather than American ('ize'), and submissions should be accompanied with a letter stating any conflicts of interest in regards to publication or competing interests. Footnotes should be kept to a minimum. References should be listed alphabetically by author at the end of the paper. For example:

Journal Articles: Riggs, D.W. (2004). The politics of scientific knowledge: Constructions of sexuality and ethics in the conversion therapy literature. *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review*, 5, 16-24.

Books: Kitzinger, C. (1987). *The social construction of lesbianism*. London: Sage.

Edited Books: Coyle, A. & Kitzinger, C. (Eds.) (2002). *Lesbian & gay psychology: New perspectives*. Oxford: BPS Blackwell.

Book Chapters: MacBride-Stewart, S. (2004). Dental dams: A parody of straight expectations in the promotion of 'safer' lesbian sex. In D.W. Riggs & G.A. Walker (Eds.), *Out in the antipodes: Australian and New Zealand perspectives on gay and lesbian issue in psychology*. Perth: Brightfire Press.

References within the text should be listed in alphabetical order separated by a semi-colon, page numbers following year. For example:

(Clarke, 2001; Peel, 2001; Riggs & Walker, 2004)
(Clarke, 2002a; b) (MacBride-Stewart, 2004, p. 398)

Authors should avoid the use of *sexist*, *racist* and *heterosexist language*. Authors should follow the guidelines for the use of non-sexist language provided by the American Psychological Society.

Papers should be submitted in Word format: title bold 12 points, author bold 11 points (with footnote including affiliation/address), abstract 10 points left aligned, article text 10 points left aligned. All other identifying information on title page for section A articles should be 10 points and left aligned.

All submissions should be sent to the Editor, either via email (preferred): damien.riggs@adelaide.edu.au, or via post: School of Psychology, The University of Adelaide, South Australia, 5005.

Deadlines

January 30 for April edition

May 30 for August edition

September 30 for December edition

